ARMOR AT WAR SERIES

7051

US Tank Battles

in North Africa and Italy 1943-45

Steven J. Zaloga

26
H96-FF
GO GET IT
U.S.A. 40103899

CONCORD
PUBLICATIONS COMPANY

7051

US Tank Battles

in North Africa and Italy 1943-45

Text and Color Plates by Steven J. Zaloga

Copyright © 2004
by CONCORD PUBLICATIONS CO.
603-609 Castle Peak Road
Kong Nam Industrial Building
10/F, B1, Tsuen Wan
New Territories, Hong Kong
www.concord-publications.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concord Publications Co.

We welcome authors who can help expand our range of books. If you would like to submit material, please feel free to contact us.

We are always on the look-out for new, unpublished photos for this series. If you have photos or slides or information you feel may be useful to future volumes, please send them to us for possible future publication. Full photo credits will be given upon publication.

ISBN 962-361-084-X
printed in Hong Kong

The North African campaign was the baptism of fire for the US Army in the European theater. The campaigns in Tunisia, Sicily, and on the Italian mainland were the prelude to the main campaigns in northwest Europe and were the primary focus of US Army operations from November 1942 to June 1944. Armor played a significant role in the Tunisian campaign, but only a supporting role in the fighting in Italy where the mountainous terrain limited the deployment of tanks. Some idea of the relative scale of armor fighting in Italy can be appreciated from the number of units deployed. The were 15 armored divisions and 37 separate tank battalions deployed in northwest Europe by 1945 while there was never more than one armored division and 8 separate tank battalions in Italy.

Operation Torch

US operations in North Africa began with amphibious landings in the French colonies of Morocco and Algeria starting on 8 November 1942. Eventually, two armored divisions were landed, the 1st Armored Division on the Mediterranean coast with the Central Assault Force in Algeria, and the 2nd Armored Division on the Atlantic coast with the Western Assault Force in Morocco. With a few exceptions, the Vichy French forces put up only token resistance to the American landings. Although there was no large-scale tank fighting, there were several small skirmishes that are noteworthy only because they were the first US tank battles of the European campaign. On 9 November 1942, M5 light tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion (Light) engaged in a short fire fight with French forces near Rabat, knocking out several French Renaults. There was at least one encounter between the 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division with a French Renault R-35 light tank company near St. Lucien in Algeria and the French lost 14 tanks with only one US M3 light tank damaged. Following the landings, the 2nd Armored Division remained with Patton's I Armored Corps in reserve in Algeria, while the 1st Armored Division moved eastward with the II Corps to take part in the Tunisian campaign.

The first US encounters with Axis forces took place later in the month. On 25 November 1942, a company from the 1st Armored Regiment knocked out a pair of Italian Semovente L40 da 47/32 tank destroyers in a short skirmish. On 25 November, the US tankers encountered German panzers for the first time, in a violent engagement between Pz.Abt.190 and the 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division. The M3 light tanks were inadequate against the German Pz.Kpfw.III and Pz.Kpfw.IV medium tanks, but the German force was obliged to withdraw. The medium tank battalions of the 1st Armored Division at the time were equipped primarily with the M3 medium tank, but M4 and M4A1 medium tanks re-equipped the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 1st Armored Regiment of the 1st Armored Division before they reached in Tunisia in December 1942.

The 1st Armored Division was part of a multi-national force amalgamated into the British First Army which attempted but failed to reach Tunis in December. The hill battles in the early winter were primarily infantry assaults by II Corps' two infantry units, the 1st and 34th Infantry Divisions, with some tank support. The Germans won the race for Tunis, reinforcing Rommel's Afrika Korps with Von Arnim's 5.Panzer-Armee which was landed in Tunisia. The Afrika Korps at the time was retreating westward into Tunisia after the defeat at El Alamein that autumn, with the British Eighth Army on its heels. By January, the US II Corps was scattered along the Eastern Dorsal mountains with elements of the 1st Armored Division reinforcing the weak French XIX Corps. The Germans were itching to take a crack at the green American troops and Von Arnim's 5.Panzer-Armee planned an attack at the key mountain passes through the Eastern Dorsals at Faid and Kasserine.

On 31 January 1943, the Germans struck and seized Faid pass from the French. Combat Command A of the 1st Armored Division was ordered to retake the pass, but the attack failed. On 14 February, Von Arnim launched Operation Fruhlingswind (Spring Wind) with 5.Panzer-Armee's 10.Panzer-Division barreling through Faid pass and the Afrika Korps' 21.Panzer-Division attacking 30 kilometers further south. Both panzer columns converged on the cross-roads town of Sidi-bou-Zid. The outnumbered tank battalions of the 1st Armored Division were overwhelmed and destroyed as they deployed in piecemeal fashion. Combat Command A (CCA) lost 44 M4 and M4A1 tanks defending Sidi-bou-Zid on 14 February, and nearly as many the following day in a futile counter-attack. The commander of the British First Army, Gen. K. Anderson, ordered the division to retreat to Sbeitla on the afternoon of 15 February, with Von Arnim's panzers on their heels. An American rearguard set up a tank ambush on the Faid-Sbeitla road which halted the German attacks for the moment. Rommel saw the American defeat at Sidi-bou-Zid as an opening for a more ambitious strike through the Kasserine pass against the retreating Americans. The main attack by German and Italian armored units through Kasserine pass took place on 20 February, pushing the thin American infantry screen aside. The German columns continued to advance for two more days, but the right column was stopped by the British 26th Armoured Brigade before Thala, while CCB of the 1st Armored Division halted the left column of 10.Panzer-Division before Tebessa. Although the US Army II Corps had been thoroughly beat up, the Germans could not sustain their attack. By this time, German supply lines were strained to the brink, and Rommel's defenses along the Mareth line were coming under pressure from Montgomery's Eighth Army. The exhausted German panzer units began retreating back through Kasserine pass, having finally lost the strategic initiative in Tunisia.

The poor performance of II Corps led Gen. Eisenhower to make immediate changes, with Gen. George S. Patton being shifted from command of I Armored Corps in Algeria to lead the demoralized II Corps in Tunisia. The practice of doling out the three American divisions in inefficient bits to reinforce the French and British ended, and the corps began to fight as a cohesive force for the first time. Through April, the II Corps pushed the Germans out of the Eastern Dorsals towards El Guettar and Maknassy, an infantry campaign with modest tank support. By the end of this fighting in late April, Eisenhower pulled Patton back to take charge of the upcoming Sicily operation, and Gen. Omar Bradley took over II Corps. Bradley was unhappy with the command arrangements, and convinced Eisenhower to shift II Corps to the northern front, with an objective of capturing the port of Bizerte. After the US infantry cleared the hills in front of the port city, the 1st Armored Division began a rapid advance on Bizerte on 2 May. The port city was finally captured on 7 May 1943 at the same time the British captured Tunis. The war in North Africa was over, and a quarter million German soldiers were captured, a loss of troops close to that at Stalingrad.

While the North African campaign had not been an auspicious debut for the US armored force, it led to more realistic training and tactics. A reorganization of the US Army armored division was one result, though it would take nearly a year before this affected the units in the Mediterranean theater.

Operation Husky: The Invasion of Sicily

With the Axis pushed out of Africa, the

Allies began plans to seize Sicily. Patton's Seventh Army was given a secondary role to Montgomery's British forces, covering the western flank while the British aimed for the main objective, the port of Messina. Since the 1st Armored Division was being rebuilt and retrained after Tunisia, the 2nd Armored Division was committed to Sicily. Two separate tank battalions that had fought in North Africa, the 70th and 753rd Tank Battalions were also deployed on Sicily. The American amphibious landings began on 10 July 1943 along a stretch of coast from Licata eastward. The first tank battles in the American sector erupted around the port of Gela, which had been seized by a light advance force of Rangers. The Italian Mobile Force E, equipped with a motley selection of captured French Renault R-35 tanks and obsolete Fiat light tanks, charged through heavy naval gunfire into the town. The Rangers began a cat-and-mouse game using bazookas and demolition charges to stop the tanks, and the attack finally faltered. The main concentration of armor near the beach-head was the Hermann Göring Panzer Division, which luckily for the Allies, was poorly led. Panzer attacks against the beach-head were stopped by naval gunfire and determined infantry resistance. On 11 July, an attack by 30-40 panzers broke through the 1st Infantry Division positions on to a flat plain near Gela. This formation was counter-attacked by Co. I, 67th Armored Regt., 2nd Armored Division which had recently landed. After losing 14 panzers in the two-hour skirmish, the Germans withdrew. There were further small scale tank battles between the Herman Göring Panzer Division and the 2nd Armored Division over the next few days. By 16 July 1943, the German attempts to stamp out the Gela beach-head had failed, costing 30 Pz.Kpfw.III and IV tanks and 14 of the 17 Tigers of 2./sPz.Abt.504. There was little tank-vs.-tank fighting later in the campaign involving US units, though there were a few small encounters with Italian armored units.

If stoutly defended, Sicily was not well suited to the use of armor in mass as the enclosed country, narrow valleys, rugged mountainous terrain and wall-enclosed fields made it difficult to deploy more than a few companies of tanks at one time. The 2nd Armored Division was used in the rapid dash to seize Palermo, a 150 mile advance in three days, reaching the city on 23 July. For most of the rest of the campaign, the tank units were used in smaller formations to provide support to the infantry - a pattern that would repeat itself for many of the same reasons in Italy. The relatively small role of tanks in the Sicily operation can be seen in the low tank casualty rate - only about 60 US tanks were lost during the fighting.

The invasion of Italy led to Mussolini's overthrow and Italy's withdrawal from the Axis. The Wehrmacht disarmed most Italian army units, and absorbed some equipment, including many armored vehicles, into their own units in Italy.

Operation Avalanche: The Salerno Landings

Senior US Army commanders had very little enthusiasm for further operations in the Mediterranean, feeling that the emphasis should shift to the main challenge in north-west Europe. But with the landings in France nearly a year away, operations continued in the Mediterranean theater, this time against the Italian mainland. German panzer forces in Italy were substantial including three panzer divisions (16., 26. and Hermann Göring) and four panzer grenadier divisions (3., 15., 29., and 90.).

On 9 September 1943, Gen. Mark Clark's Fifth Army landed at Salerno, southeast of Naples. Due to the hilly terrain and the experiences in Sicily, the armored element of the force was small, initially consisting of two separate tank battalions. German panzer forces in the area were more formidable, the 16.Panzer-Division near Salerno itself, and the battered Hermann Göring and 15.Panzer-Grenadier-Divisions refitting near Naples. The 16.Panzer-Division began to counter-attack the beach-head from the moment of the first landings on 9 September 1943. However, the attacks were piecemeal due to the width of the beach-head, and the panzer force was gradually ground down by stiff infantry resistance backed up by naval gunfire and air attacks. The Hermann Göring, 15.Pz.Gren., and 29.Pz.Gren. Divisions joined the fray over the next few days, and the landings were in serious jeopardy. Before the fighting subsided, three panzer and three panzer grenadier divisions were pitted against five Allied infantry divisions. Naval gunfire and Allied air attacks played a critical role in defeating the German counter-attacks. The heavy casualties along the Salerno beach-head finally forced the Germans to shift to the defensive by late September, and the Fifth Army reached Naples on 1 October 1943.

The ensuing winter campaign was one of the most bitter fought by the US Army in the European theater. Churchill had referred to Italy as "the soft underbelly of Europe", one of the most ludicrous pronouncements of an otherwise astute leader. The geography of Italy was dominated by the Apennine mountain chain running like a spine down the center. To make matters more difficult, there were frequent rivers running perpendicular from the mountains to the sea, forming natural defensive barriers. The Wehrmacht skillfully set up defensive lines, exploiting the rivers and mountains and amplifying their defensive advantages. The Allies reached the Volturno river by 7 October, and slowly moved northward towards the Gustav line by January 1944. The most famous of the defenses along the Gustav line was at Monte Cassino, where the Germans repulsed several Allied assaults.

The fighting in Italy was primarily by infantry and artillery, with modest tank support. The US Army deployed several separate tank battalions to Italy under the nominal command of two Armored Groups. In reality, the Armored Group headquarters seldom if ever had tactical control over the battalions and served mainly as administrative units. Tank battalions instead were put under corps headquarters. This pattern differed somewhat from the practice later used in northwest Europe, where tank battalions were usually attached to infantry divisions for operations. The terrain permitted little mobility, and the tanks were used often in the fire support role, both direct fire support alongside the infantry, and on occasion in indirect fire support to deepen the field artillery.

Elements of the 1st Armored Division, starting with the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment, began to be deployed in Italy during the fighting for the Rapido river in December 1943 and by January its Combat Command B was deployed to support attacks on the Gustav line. However, the bulk of its tank units did not see any combat for most of the later half of 1943.

Operation Shingle: Anzio-Nettuno

The stalemate along the Gustav line prompted Gen. Mark Clark to stage an end run by landing an amphibious force closer to Rome at Anzio-Nettuno. It was planned to follow this with a reinvigorated attack on the Gustav line near Cassino. The landings began on 22 January 1944 and among the first unit ashore was the 751st Tank Battalion. The Anzio operation, instead of becoming a rapid counter-stroke, bogged down into bitter battle of attrition. Although the landing was largely unopposed, the Wehrmacht reacted with considerable speed, moving reinforcements to contain the bridgehead. With memories of the panzer attacks at Salerno fresh in their minds, some Allied commanders favored the conservative approach of establishing a firm beach-head rather than pressing on towards Rome. By the time that the VI Corps was ready to move on 30 January 1944, the Germans had moved eight divisions opposite Anzio, substantially outnumbering the invasion force. During the initial landings, the US Army had put ashore two tank battalions to provide support for the infantry. The bulk of the 1st Armored Division, minus the elements of CCB near Cassino, were part of the follow-on force that was gradually landed through early February. They were deployed to stiffen the defenses, and the tanks were often used to provide additional artillery fire support. The Germany 14.Armee began counter-attacking the Anzio beach-head in force on 16 February 1944. Naval gunfire, field artillery, and supporting fire from the tanks helped break the back of the first wave of attacks. Another wave of assaults began on 28 February, but was also repulsed. A bloody series of battles continued during the winter months both on the Anzio and Cassino fronts. To break the stalemate, the Allies planned Operation Diadem, a renewed assault on Cassino including a deception plan faking another amphibious landing near Rome. The Germans were duped by the deception and pulled some forces back from Cassino. With the Gustav line weakened, the Allied assault began on 11 May 1944. By this stage, the Italian campaign had become a truly multi-national campaign on the Allied side with tough French Moroccan mountain troops finally breaking through the Gustav line, the Poles taking the Cassino monastery, and Canadian, New Zealand, South African, Indian and Australian troops reinforcing the British assault. As the Gustav line began to crumble under this onslaught, the Anzio beach-head sprang to life, with the 1st Armored Division and several separate tank battalions playing a key role in the breakout operation near Cisterna.

There were several innovations developed locally to speed the assault. A number of T2 tank recovery vehicles were modified to permit them to carry and deploy a thirty foot section of treadway bridge to breach German anti-tank ditches. The 1st Armored Regiment and the 191st Tank Battalion were both issued with mine-field clearing M2 demolition snakes, a variation on the bangalore torpedo idea, pushing lengths of pipe filled with high explosive in front of them to breach German minefields. These were successfully used in a few cases where the minefield had been previously identified. The commander of the 3rd Infantry Division sponsored a program to build thirty sets of "battle-sleds" each consisting of two trains with six sleds each to permit a tank to tow 12 infantrymen behind the tank with some degree of safety. One platoon was moved forward about two miles by tanks of the 751st Tank Battalion near Conca, but the infantry was extremely uncomfortable in the sleds due to the heavy dust and exhaust fumes behind the tanks, the very hard ride on the ground, and the tendency of the sleds to flip during a turn. The battle-sled idea was a flop and they were never used again.

Contrary to doctrine, the 1st Armored Division was given a sector of the front to conduct a breakout operation instead of being used as an exploitation force once the breakthrough had been achieved. As a result, it suffered very heavy losses during the attack, losing 108 M4 medium tanks and 45 M5 light tanks. After a frustrating six months of stalemate, US troops entered Rome on 4 June 1944. Following the Anzio breakthrough, the 1st Armored Division was pulled out of the line for refitting and it was reorganized under the new 1943 tables of organization and equipment. The 1st and 13th Armored Regiments were disbanded and the division was now reconstituted on the basis of three tank battalions and three armored infantry battalions instead of the old mix of two armored and one armed infantry regiments. As a result, its tank strength fell from six to three tank battalions.

From Rome to the Po

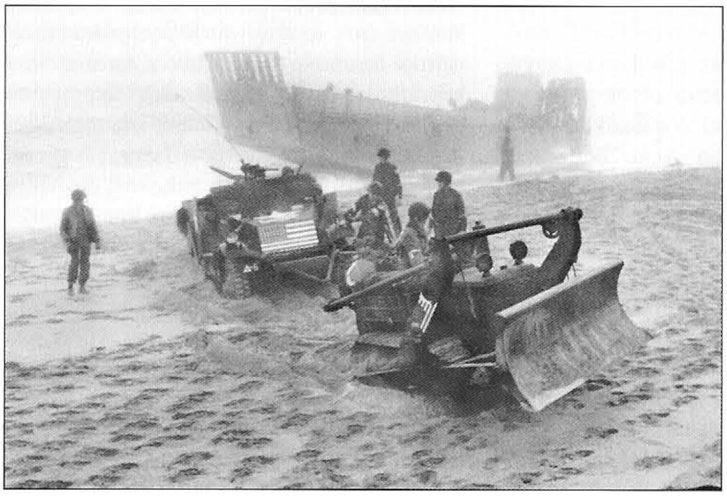
Although the fall of Rome finally raised the hopes that the stalemate in Italy had been broken, US Army commanders were adamant that no further forces should be wasted in Italy when the main contest began in France on 6 June 1944. Furthermore, some units already in Italy were allotted to the Seventh Army which was forming up in Italian ports for Operation Dragoon - an amphibious landing on the Mediterranean coast in southern France to follow the Normandy landings in August. Of the eight tank battalions in Italy at the time, three were committed to France. The 70th Tank Battalion, veteran of Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy, was re-equipped with DD tanks and spearheaded the attack on Utah Beach in Normandy. Likewise, the equally experienced 753rd Tank Battalion switched to DD tanks for the Dragoon landings. At peak strength, the US tank force in Italy in the summer of 1944 including the 1st Armored Division was 14 tank battalions, but only 8 by the autumn of 1944. This was a mere shadow of the 75 tank battalions in combat in north-west Europe. Total US Army strength in Italy fell from a high of 9 divisions at the time of Salerno to only 5 during the fighting for the Gothic line in the early autumn of 1944.

Drained of forces and given low priority for supplies, the Allied advance past Rome ground to a halt after reaching Florence and encountering the German Gothic line. The Italian theater was starved of troops and equipment in subsequent months as priority was given to the campaign in France. The Fifth Army began its attempt to rupture the Gothic line on 10 September 1944 though the Il Giogo pass. The German defenses here were well prepared, including emplaced Panther tank turrets which controlled many narrow mountain passes. In conjunction with breakthroughs in the British sector, the Gothic line defense crumbled, and the Allies began moving into the more favorable terrain of the Po river valley. Nevertheless, the Allies could not take advantage of the breakthrough as they were running out of men and machines. By this stage of the war, German forces in Italy actually outnumbered Allied forces, and in late October, the Allies had exhausted their supply of artillery ammunition in Italy. The weather had turned miserable and the US Army went over to the defensive for the rest of the winter. The effects of the low priority given the Italian theater can be seen in the photos here. The predominant tank type was the older production batches of the M4A1 medium tank, and this remained the backbone of Fifth Army armored units through the end of war. Some M4A3 (76mm) began arriving in the summer of 1944, but in very modest numbers.

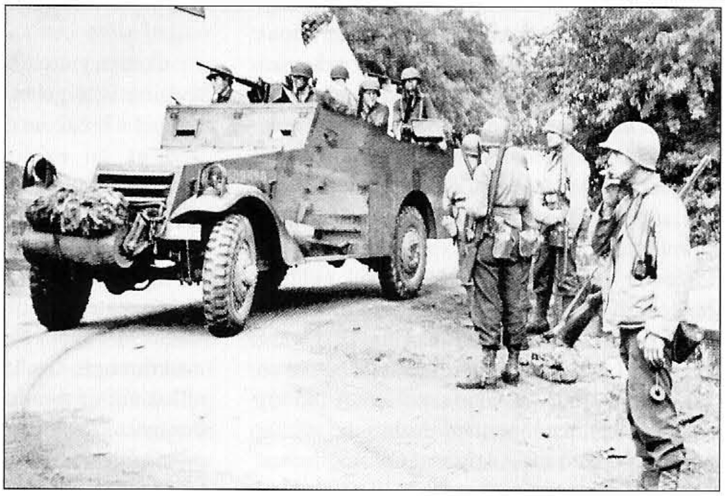
The Allied attacks in Italy did not resume until spring 1945. The attacks starting on 1 April 1945 included extensive use of special armor. Both American and British forces used amtrac amphibious tractors to overcome the numerous water barriers. Special bridging vehicles had been developed to overcome the numerous German defensive anti-tank ditches. The terrain in the Po valley was far more conducive to armor operations, and the 1st Armored Division raced past Modena, reaching Milan by the end of the month. German forces surrendered on 2 May 1945.

US armor played a secondary role in the Italian campaign, becoming more important on the rare occasions when mobile warfare was possible such as the Po valley campaign in April 1945, but as often as not relegated to a fire support mission during operations in difficult terrain. Nevertheless, tanks saw extensive combat use as is evident from the heavy tank casualties. From the time of the Salerno landings in September 1943 to the end of the war in May 1945, the Fifth Army armored units lost 1,171 M4 medium tanks, 431 light tanks, 236 tank destroyers, and numerous other light armored vehicles.

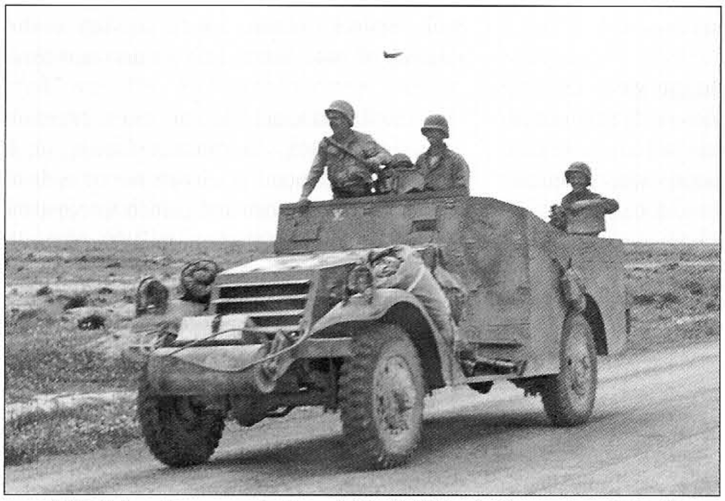
The photographs here unless otherwise noted are all official US Army Signal Corps photos from the collections of the US National Archives, the Patton Museum at Ft. Knox, the Military History Institute at the US Army War College, and the special collections at the US Military Academy, West Point.



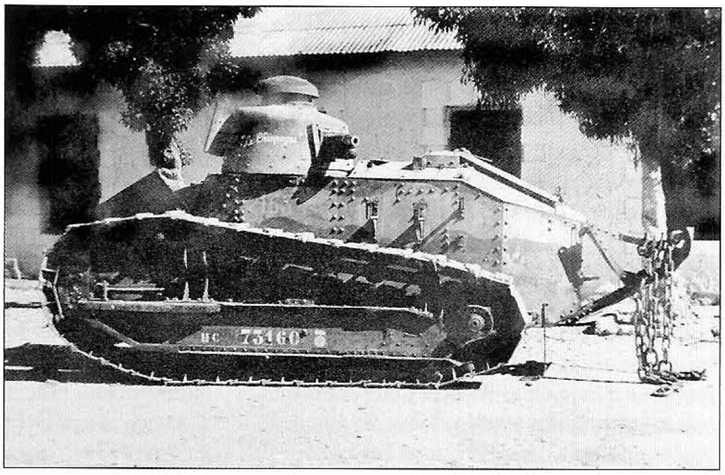
US armored vehicles taking part in the Operation Torch landings on the French North African coast were prominently marked with US flags in the hopes that French troops would not fire on them. This M3A1 scout car has bogged down on the beach and is being recovered by a bulldozer.



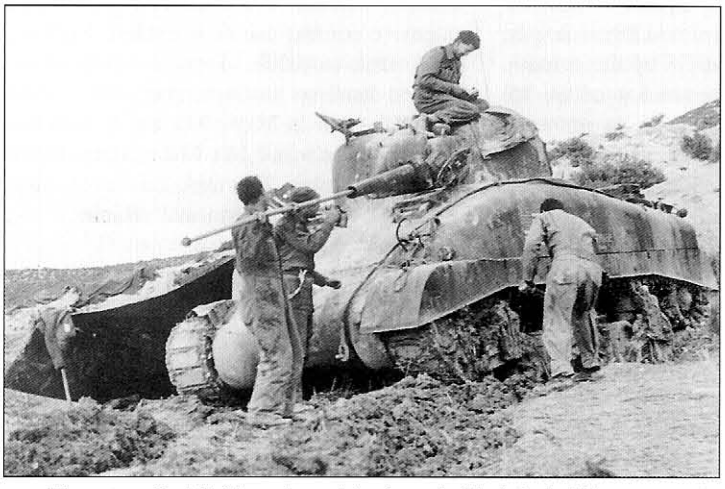
A M3A1 scout car advances beyond the beach-head during the landings in French North Africa in November 1942. The M3A1 scout car was extensively used by US forces in the Tunisian campaign and on Sicily, but was gradually replaced by the M8 armored car in 1943 during the Italian campaign.



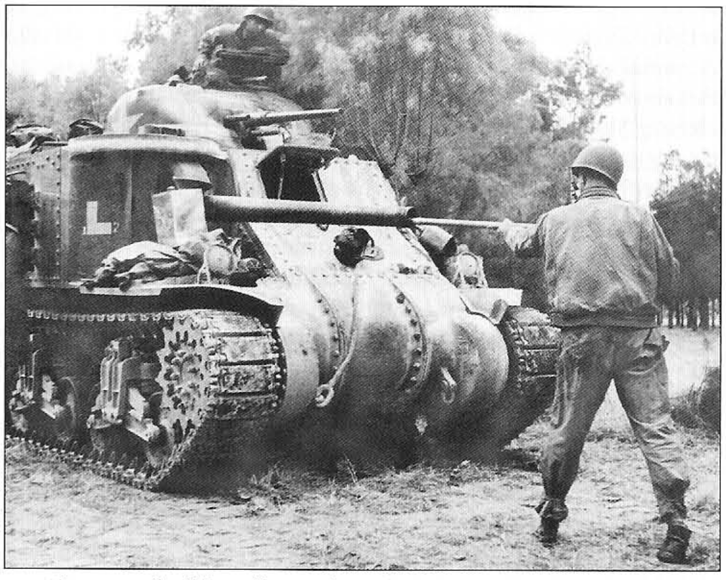
A M3A1 on the move in French North Africa in November 1942. These scout cars were not popular with US troops due to their lack of armor protection and this was the only campaign where they were widely seen in US service.



Among the first armor encounters in North Africa were several small skirmishes between US and French tanks of the Vichy French forces. The Renault FT light tank named "Le Champagne" was captured during fighting for the Port Lyautey airport on the outskirts of Casablanca in November 1942.

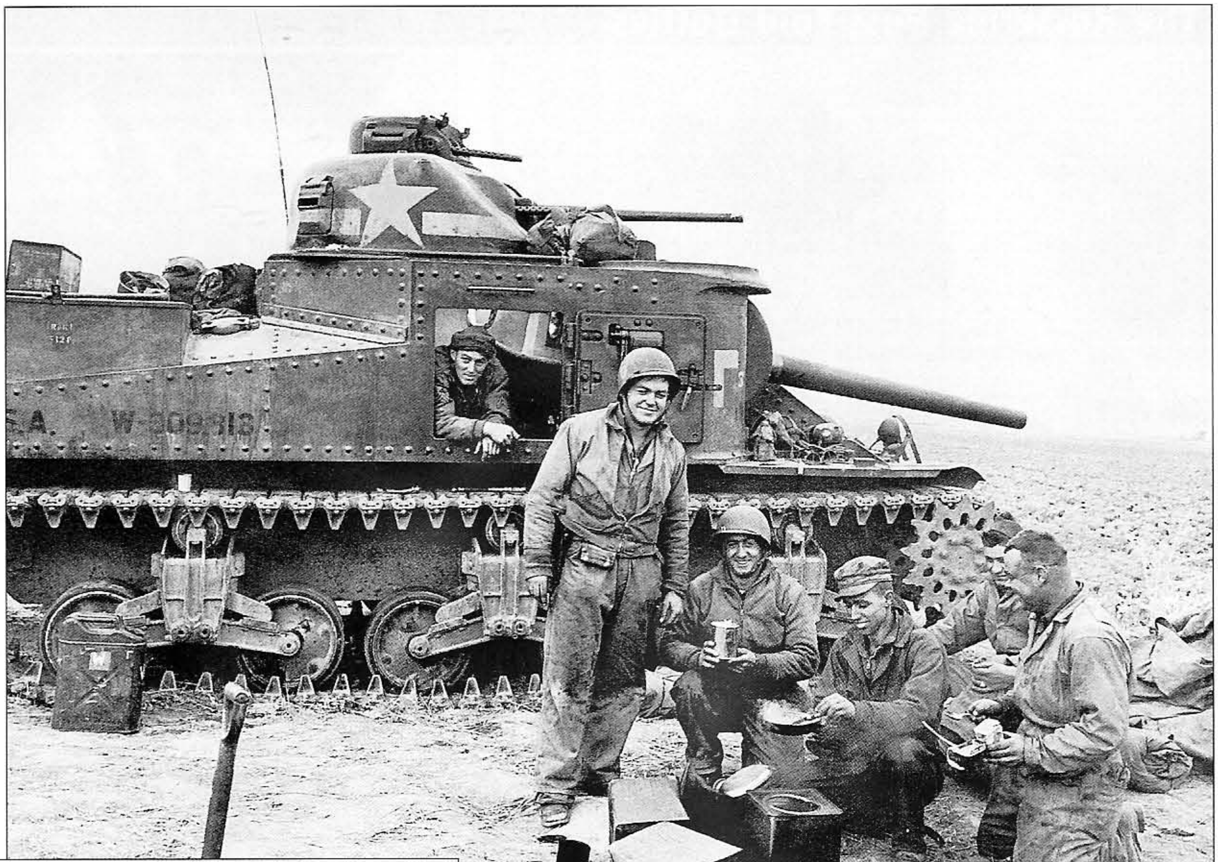


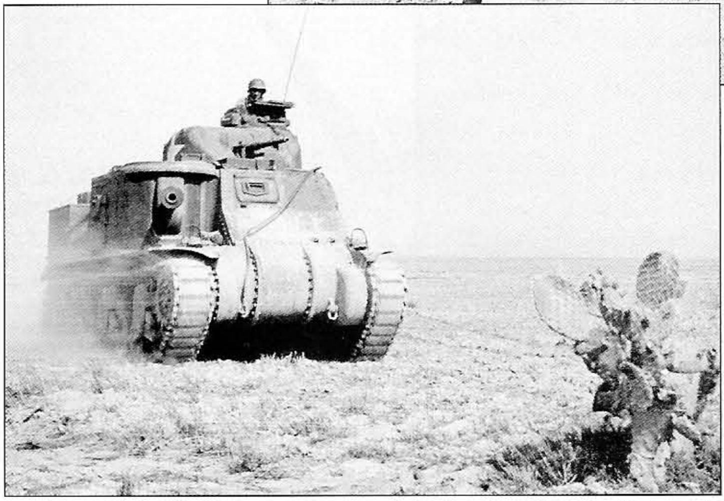
The crew of a M4A1 swabs out the barrel of their tank. This appears to be a tank from the 2nd Armored Division and the US flags applied to the hull side and front for the initial November 1942 landings can be barely seen.



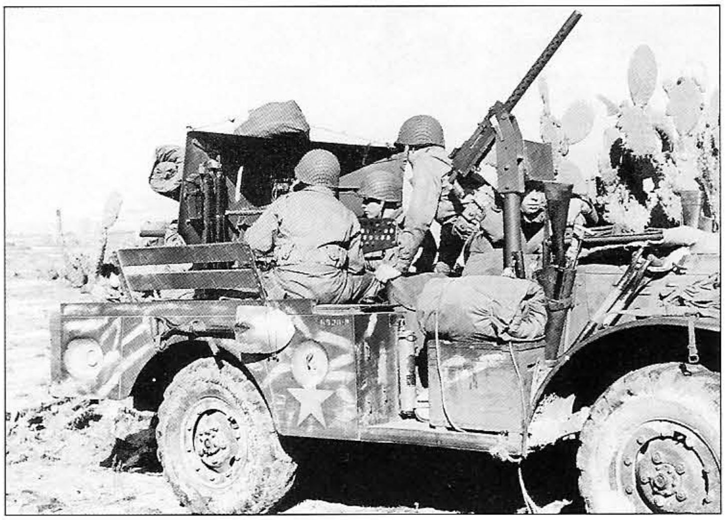
The crew of a M3 medium tank swab out the barrel following the fighting near Medjez al Bab in November 1942. The marking aside the gun identifies this as a tank of Co. F, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division.

The crew of a M3 medium tank of Co. D, 2nd Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division is seen cooking food during a break near Souk el Arba on 23 November 1942.This is a later production M3 with the longer M3 gun and stamped road-wheels.

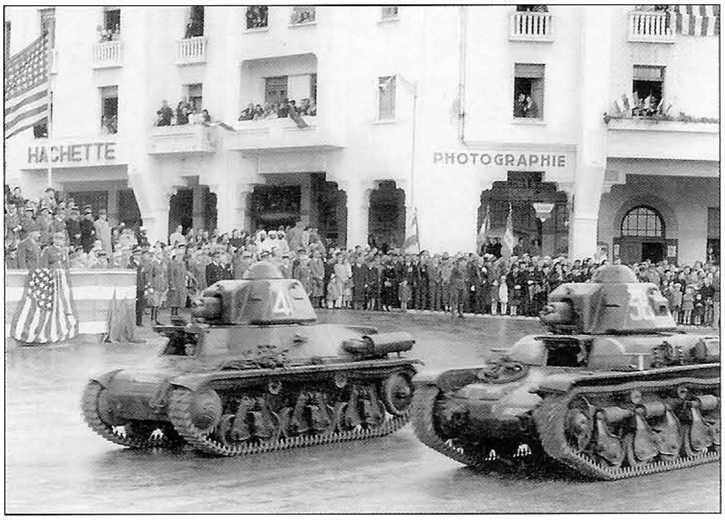




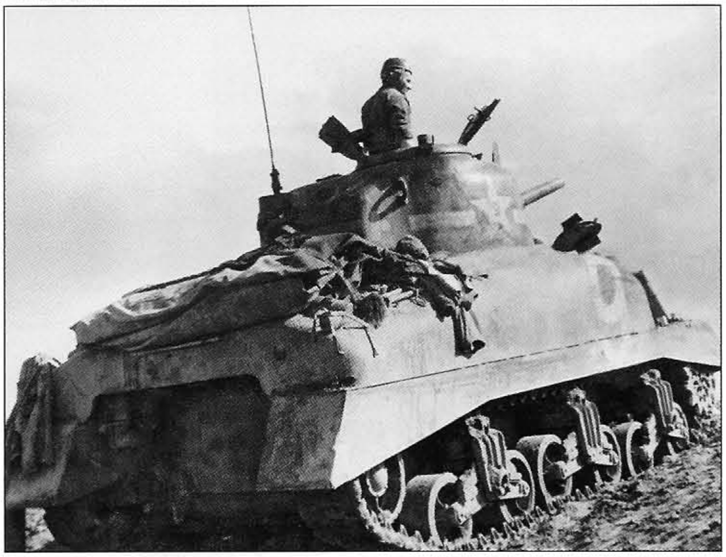
This M3 Lee of the 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division is seen advancing near Souk el Khemis, Tunisia on 25 November 1942 during the battles by the Eastern Task Force to capture Tunis.



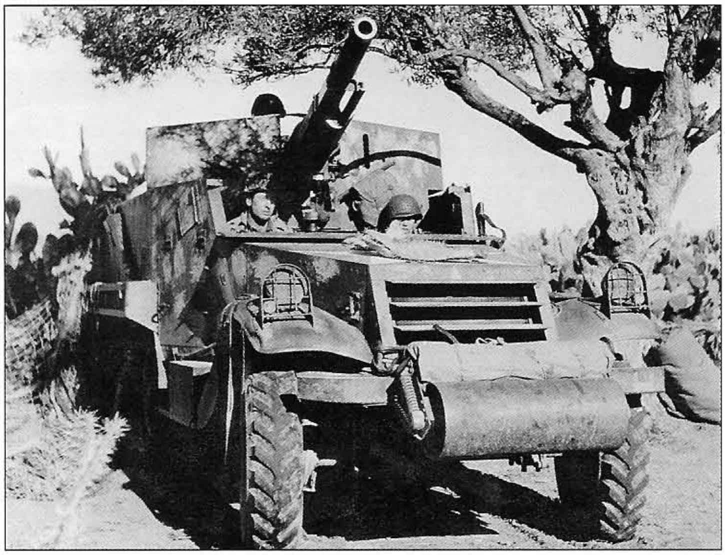
A M6 37mm gun motor carriage in action in Tunisia in 1943, using cactus for camouflage. Like many US Army vehicles, it has had an improvised camouflage applied with local mud. These expedient light tank destroyers were not popular and were retired as quickly as possible due to the inadequate performance of their gun and their lack of protective armor for the crew.



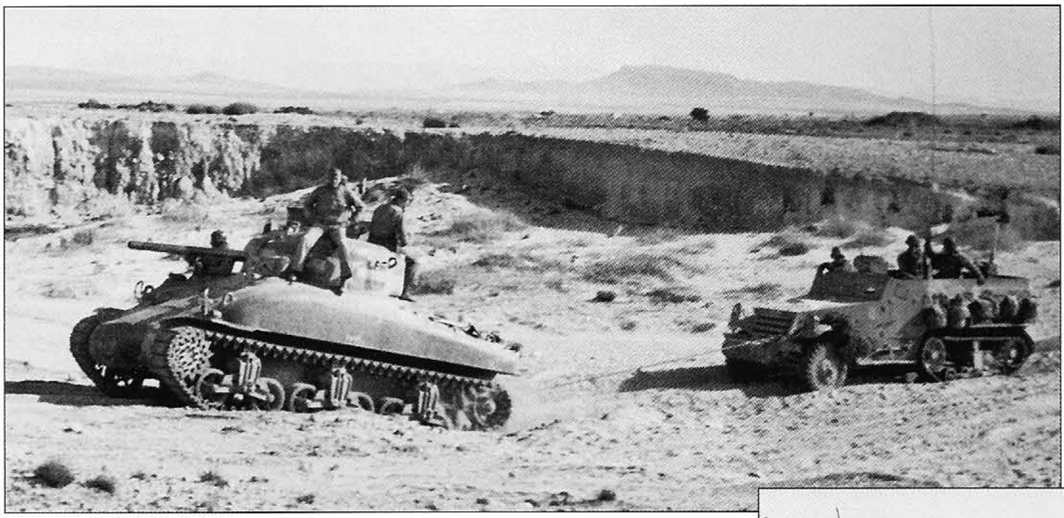
General George S. Patton and French officers including Gen. Nogues view a display of French colonial troops in Rabat, Morocco on 18 December 1942. The H-39 and R-35 in the parade are from the 1 Regiment des Chasseurs d'Afrique. At the time, Patton commanded the I Armored Corps in Algeria.



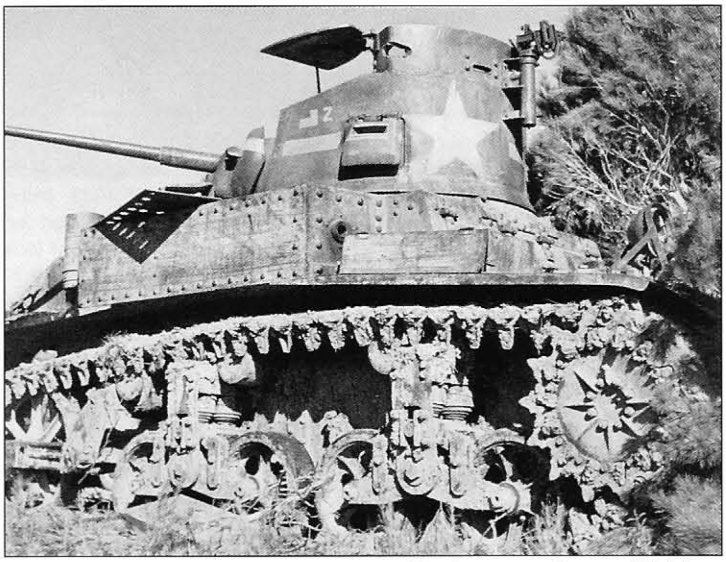
A M4A1 of E Company, 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division in mid-February 1943. This company lost most of its tanks during fighting at Sidi bou Zid on 14-15 February during battles with the 21.Panzer-Division and Tigers of sPz.Abt.501. This particular tank survived, and another photo of it appears later. The censor has painted over the markings on the rear.



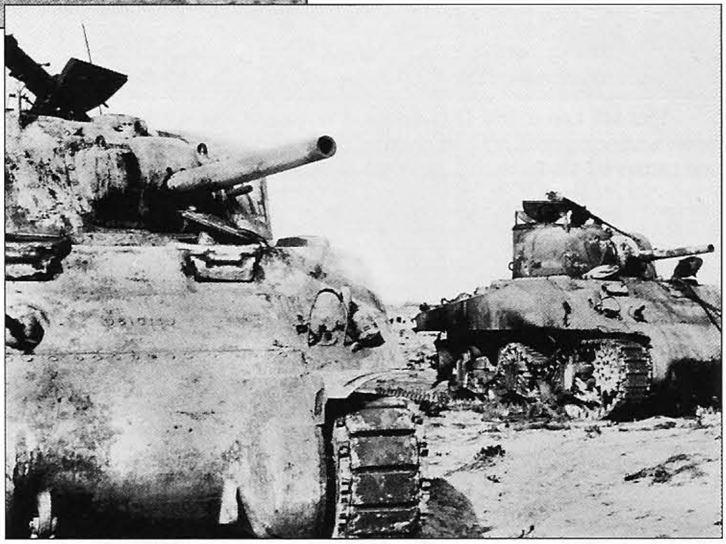
The basic equipment of the first tank destroyer battalions deployed in North Africa was the M3 75mm gun motor carriage, a combination of the M3 half-track and the WWI vintage French 75mm M1897 gun. These were only an expedient, and two of the later tank battalions deployed in Tunisia were equipped with the better M10 3-in. GMC.



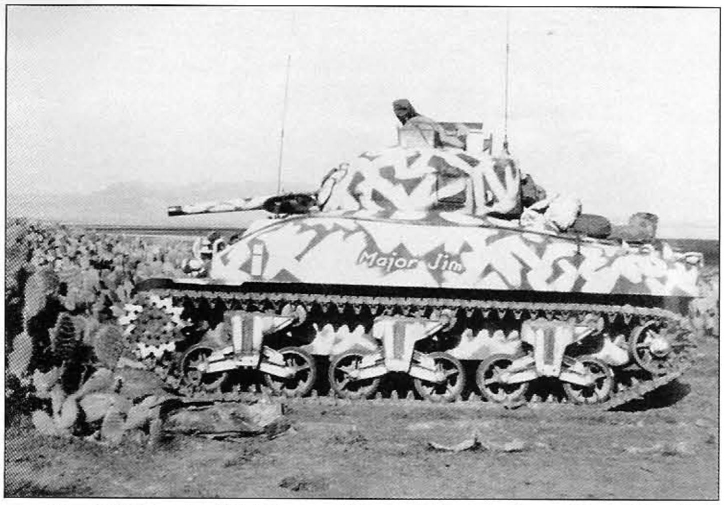
A M4A1 medium tank of Co. G, 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division pulls a M3 half-track out of a wadi near Sidi bou Zid during the fighting there on 14 February 1943. Most of this unit was knocked out later in the day during fighting with the German 21.Panzer-Division.



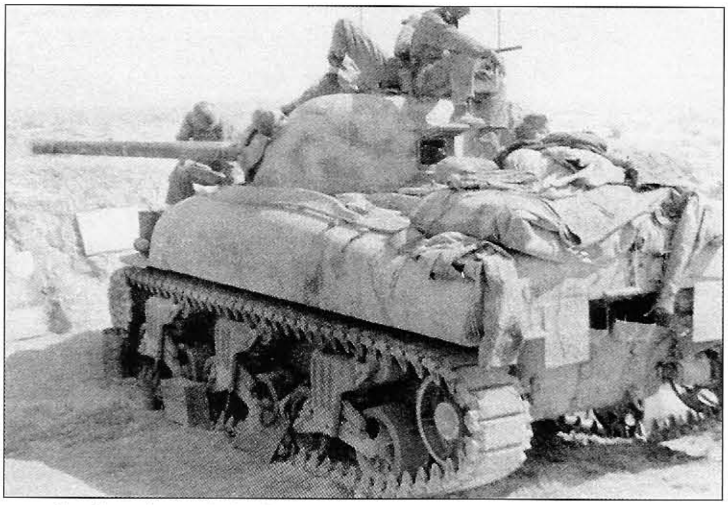
A M3 light tank of Co. C, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division. This is an intermediate production type with the welded turret and cupola. Most of the 1st Armored Division light tank units used the late production M3 with the low-profile turret.



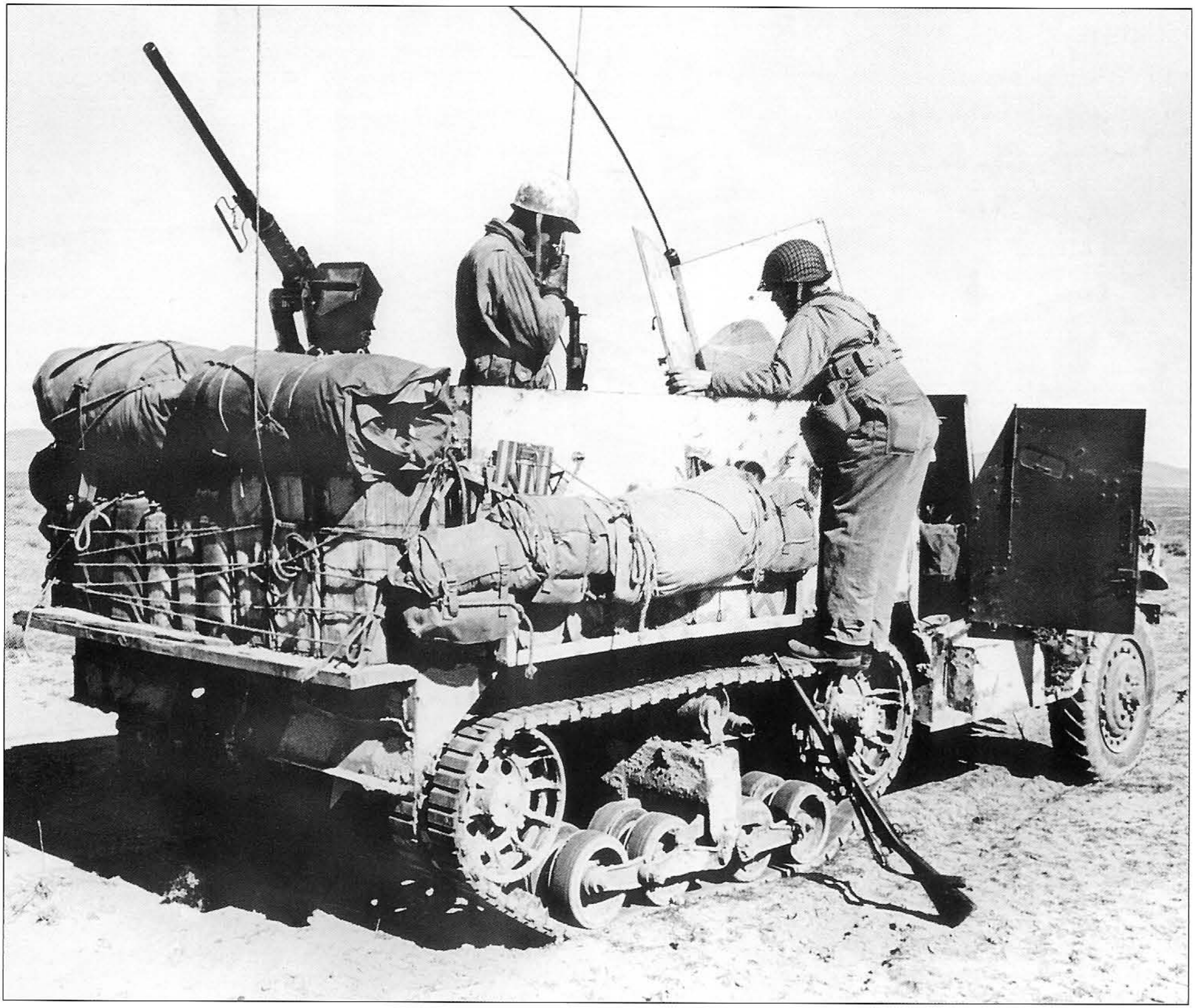
A pair of M4 medium tanks of Co. F, 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, knocked out during the 15 February counterattack by Combat Command C southwest of Sidi Salem. This company was virtually wiped out in a short engagement with Pz.Kpfw.III and Pz.Kpfw.IV tanks with the tank in the foreground, #19, knocked out by a 75mm round from a Pz.Kpfw.IV, and the tank in the background, #3, knocked out by a 50mm round from a Pz.Kpfw.III.



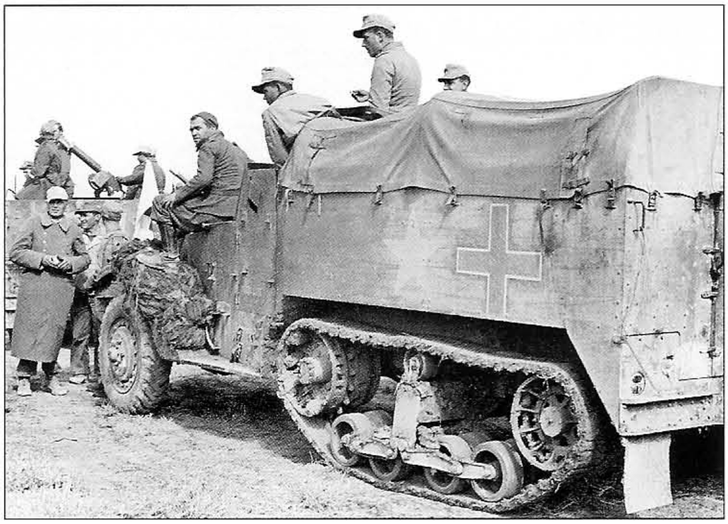
The M4A1 tank of Maj. James Simmerman, executive officer of the 2nd Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment shows the type of improvised mud camouflage commonly applied to the division's tanks. This particular tank was lost covering the withdrawal from the Kasserine pass in late February. Note the two radios in use due to its role as a command tank. (Patton Museum)



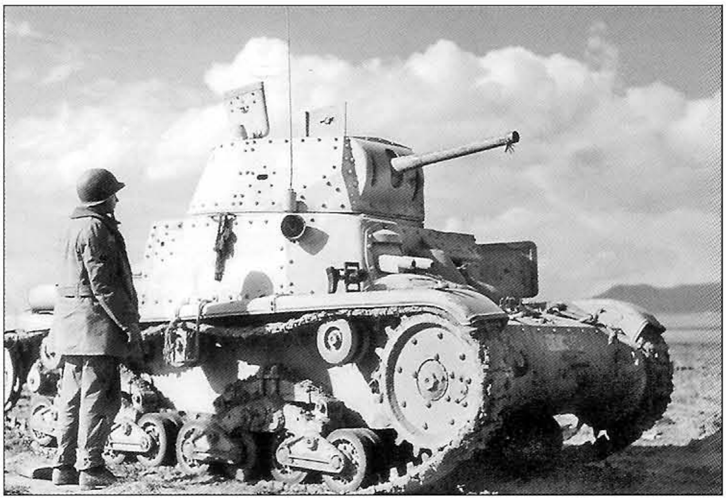
Another photo of the M4A1 named "Major Jim" prior to the Kasserine pass fighting. Although not the best quality, this view shows a common field modification on M3 and M4A1 tanks in the 1st Armored Division with an added steel plate over the air filters on the hull rear. (Patton Museum)



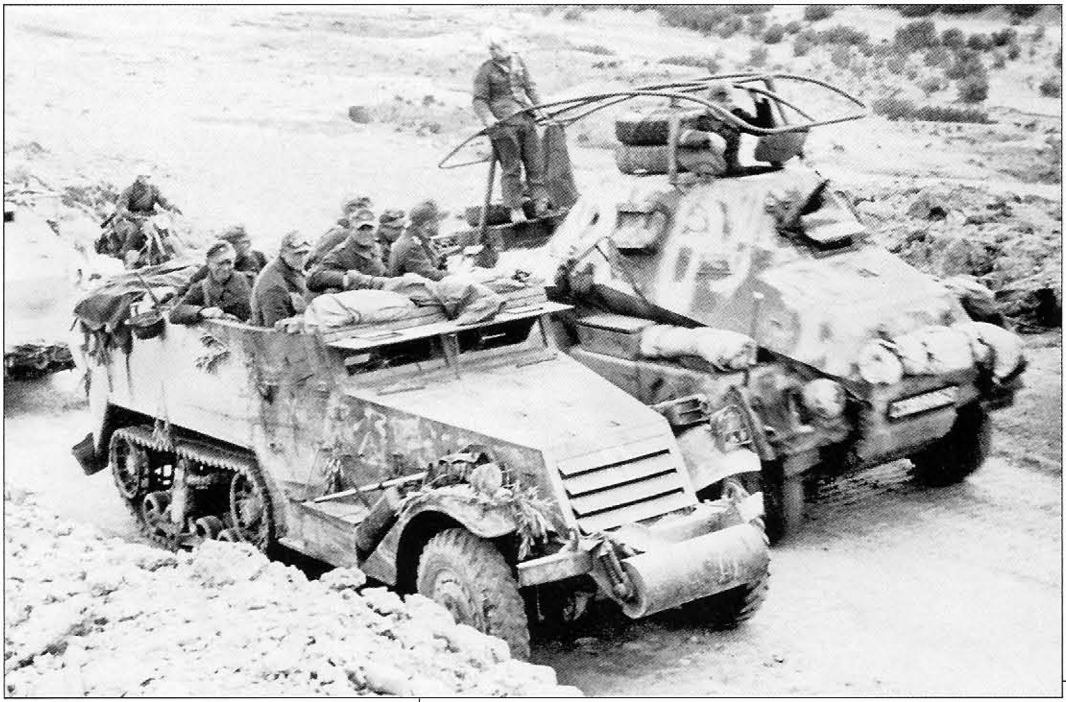
This M2A1 half-track is being used as a command vehicle by an armored infantry battalion of the 1st Armored Division. Like many of the division's vehicles, it has been daubed with camouflage made from local mud. (NARA)



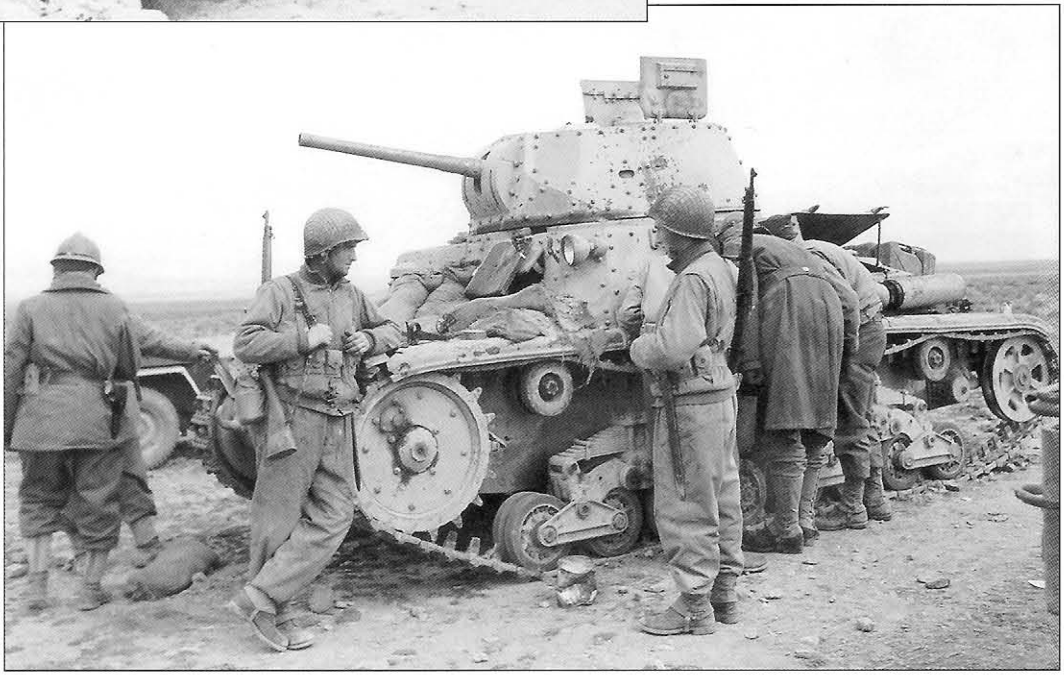
The Germans captured a significant amount of American equipment during the Kasserine-Faid pass fighting in February 1943, including 95 half-tracks of various types. (NARA).



This Centauro Division M14/41 tank was lost during the fighting in the Kasserine pass battles and is being examined by a US soldier on 24 February 1943. This version of the standard Italian tank used a more powerful engine than the M13/40.

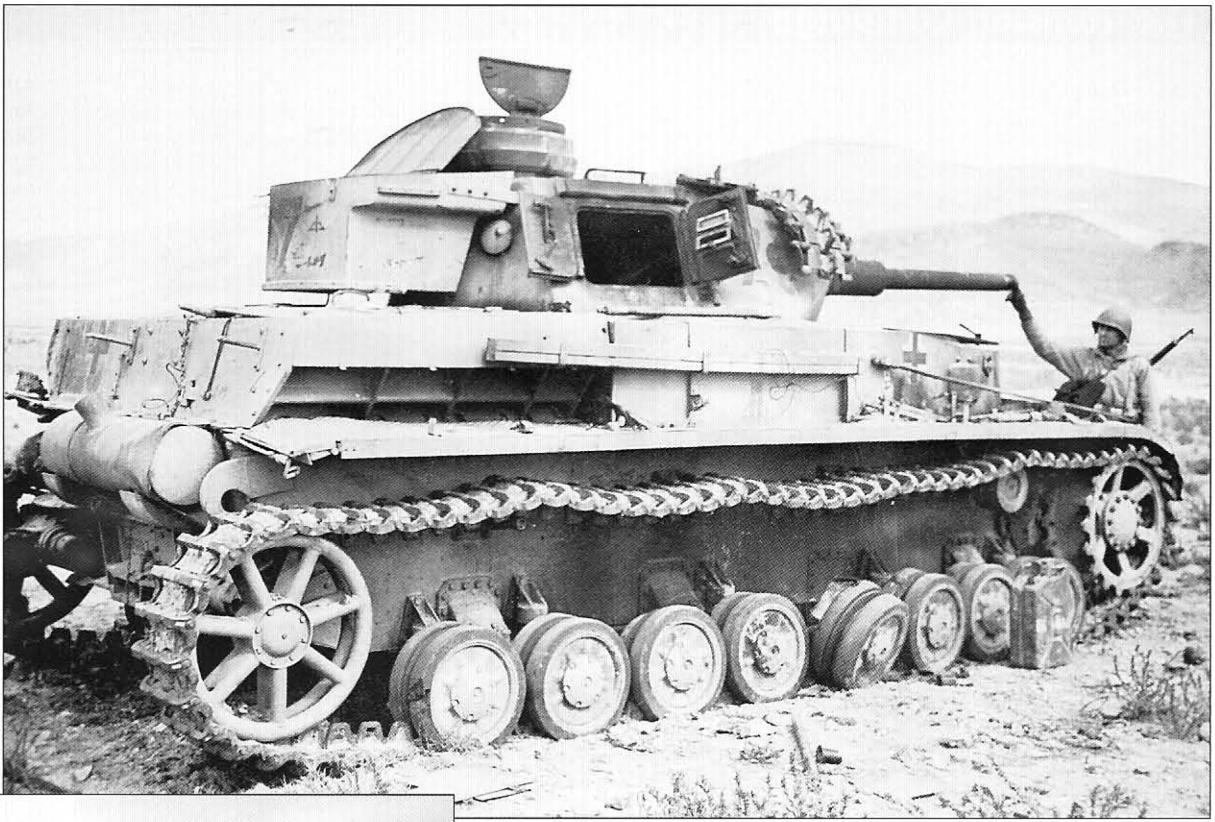


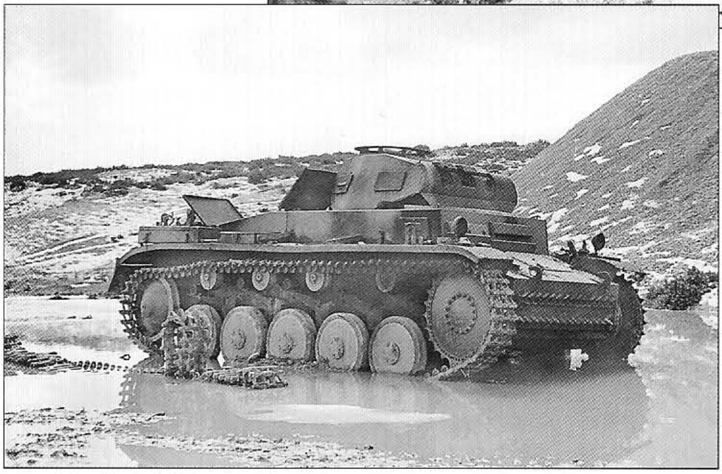
A German mechanized column moves forward following the Kasserine pass fighting with a captured M3 half-track in the lead. Behind it is a Sd.Kfz.263 radio vehicle. (NARA)



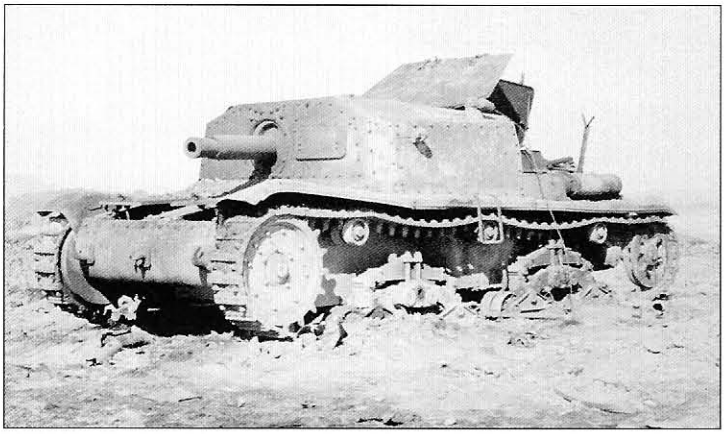
US and French troops look over an abandoned M14/41 tank of the Centauro Division lost during the Kasserine pass fighting.

A Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.F2 of Pz.Rgt.8, 15.Panzer-Division lies abandoned in Kasserine pass on 26 February after US forces recaptured the area. Both the divisional and regimental insignia are evident on the rear stowage bin, along with a spade marking and number 7 on the turret side.

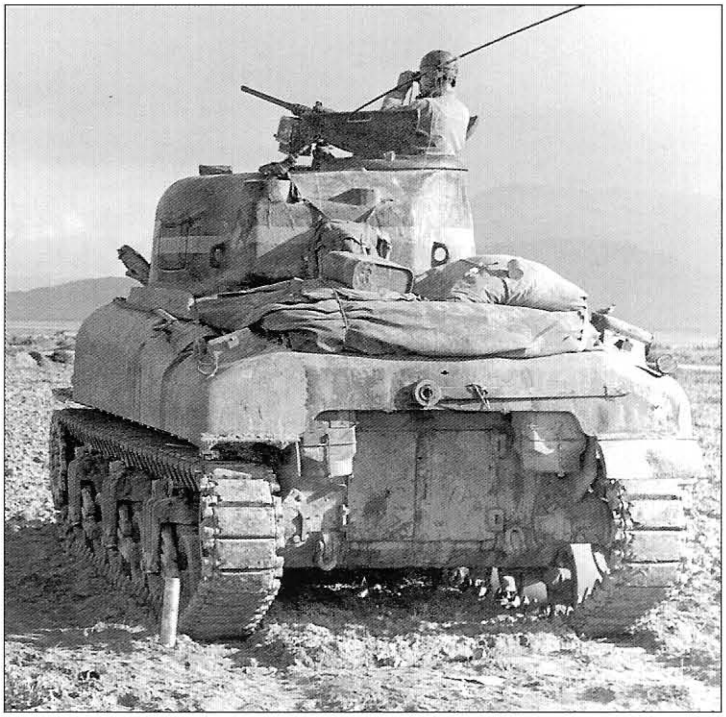




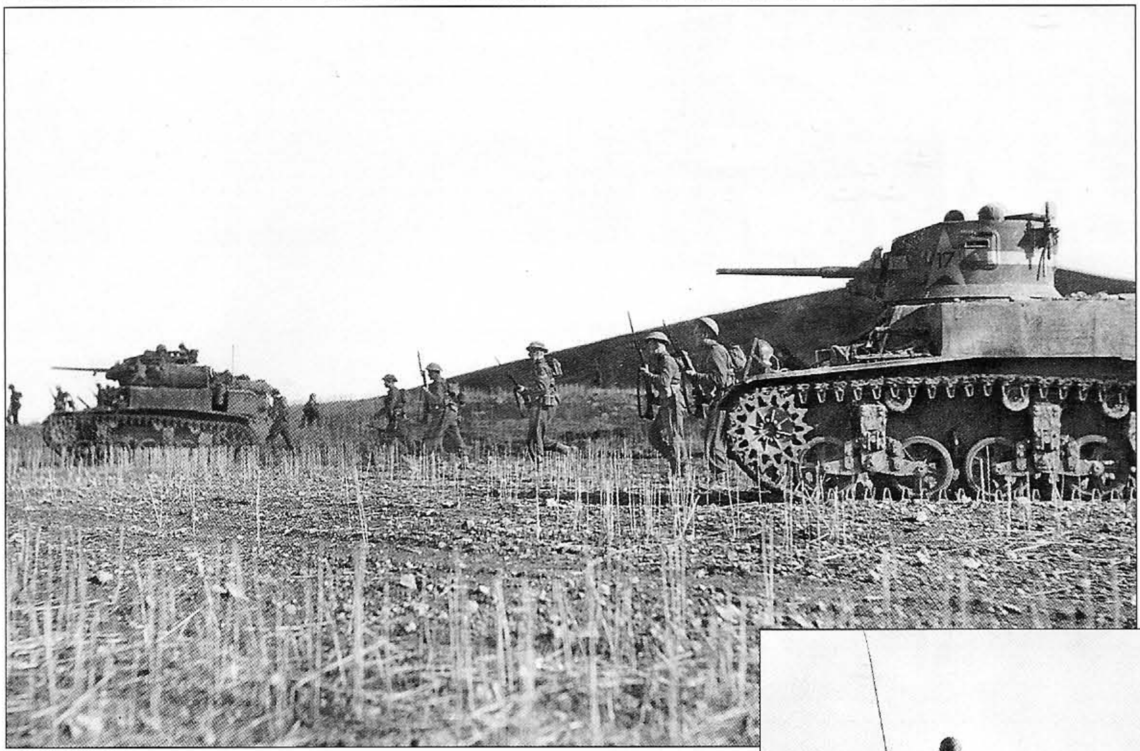
A Pz.Kpfw.II light tank of Aufklärung Abt.3 lies derelict in a sodden wash near Kasserine pass in March 1943 after the US counter-attack. Although obsolete as a battle tank, the Pz.Kpfw.II was still used for reconnaissance and other missions until the end of the campaign.



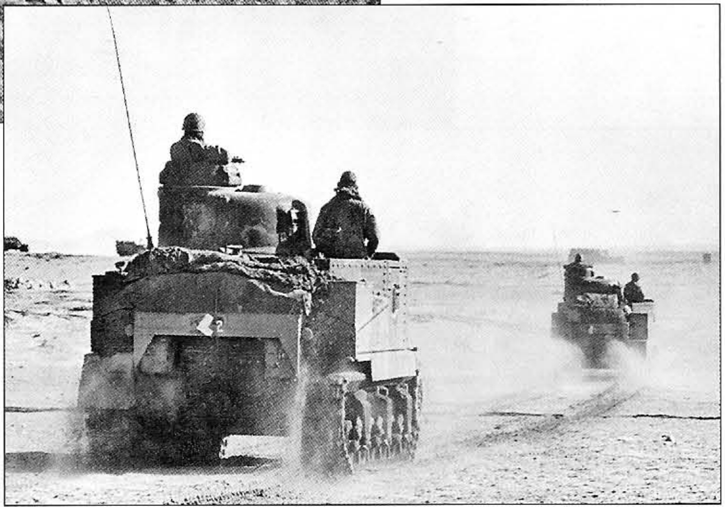
A burned out Semovente M41 75/18 remains in the Kasserine pass area after the February fighting. The first battalion of these arrived in Tripoli in December 1941 and were a welcome relief for Italian forces which had been forced to rely on the weakly armed M13/40 and M14/41 tanks. The Semoventes served with the tanks of the Piscicelli battle group against the 2/13th Armored Regiment during the Kasserine pass fighting.



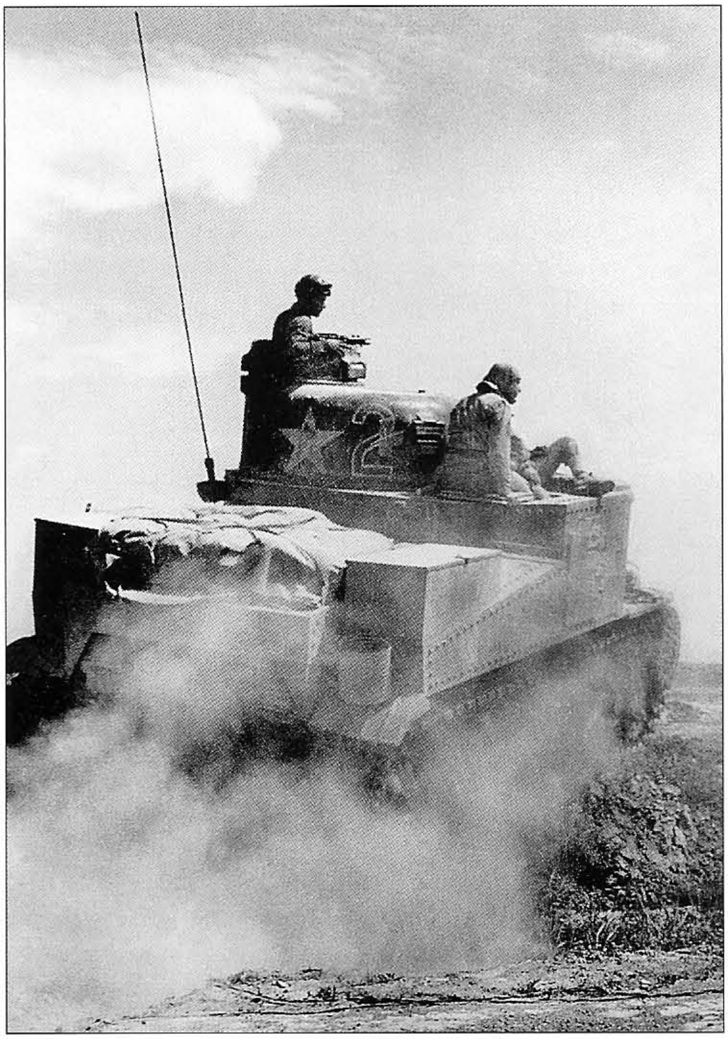
A M4A1 medium tank of Capt. G. W. Meade, commander of Co. I, 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division on the approaches to Kasserine pass on 24 Feb 1943 shortly after the Allies had finally stopped the German and Italian advance.



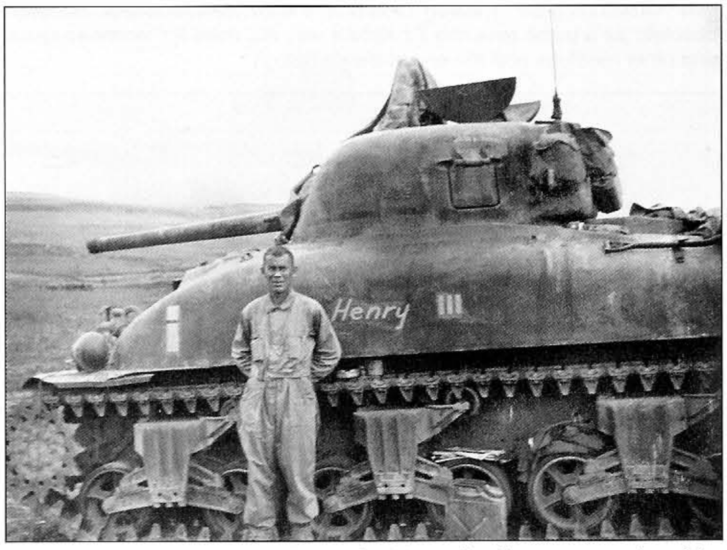
A M3 light tank from 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division support a British infantry attack during the fighting in Tunisia in 1943. The nearest tank is named "Zombie", and the stripes on the star indicate it belongs to the 3rd Platoon. It is a late production M3 with welded hull, evident from the retention of the sponson machine guns.



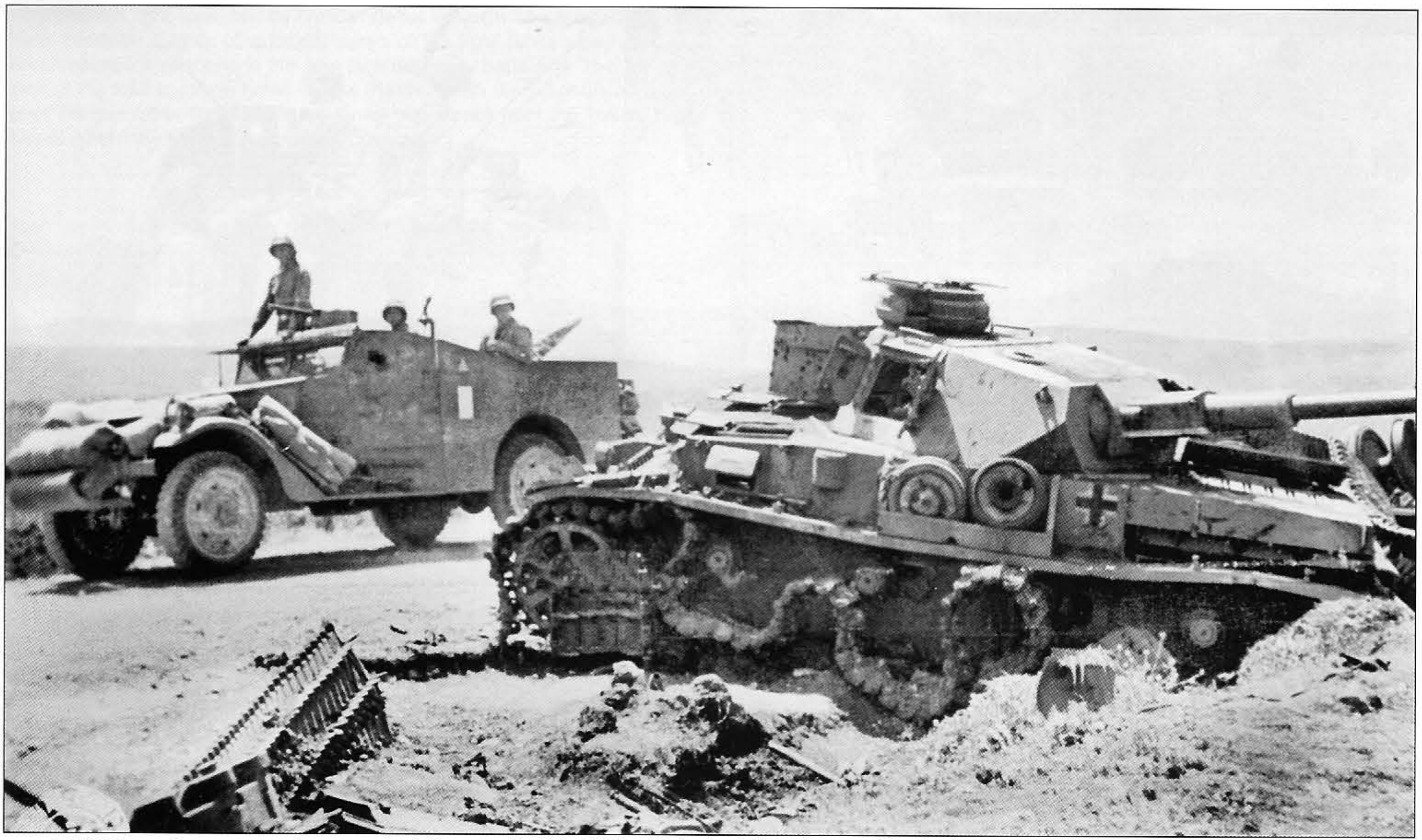
A column of tanks of Co. I, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division move forward during the fighting in Tunisia in the spring of 1943. The 1st Armored Division used a set of distinctive geometric insignia to identify their tanks and an example can be seen here on the rear of the tank.



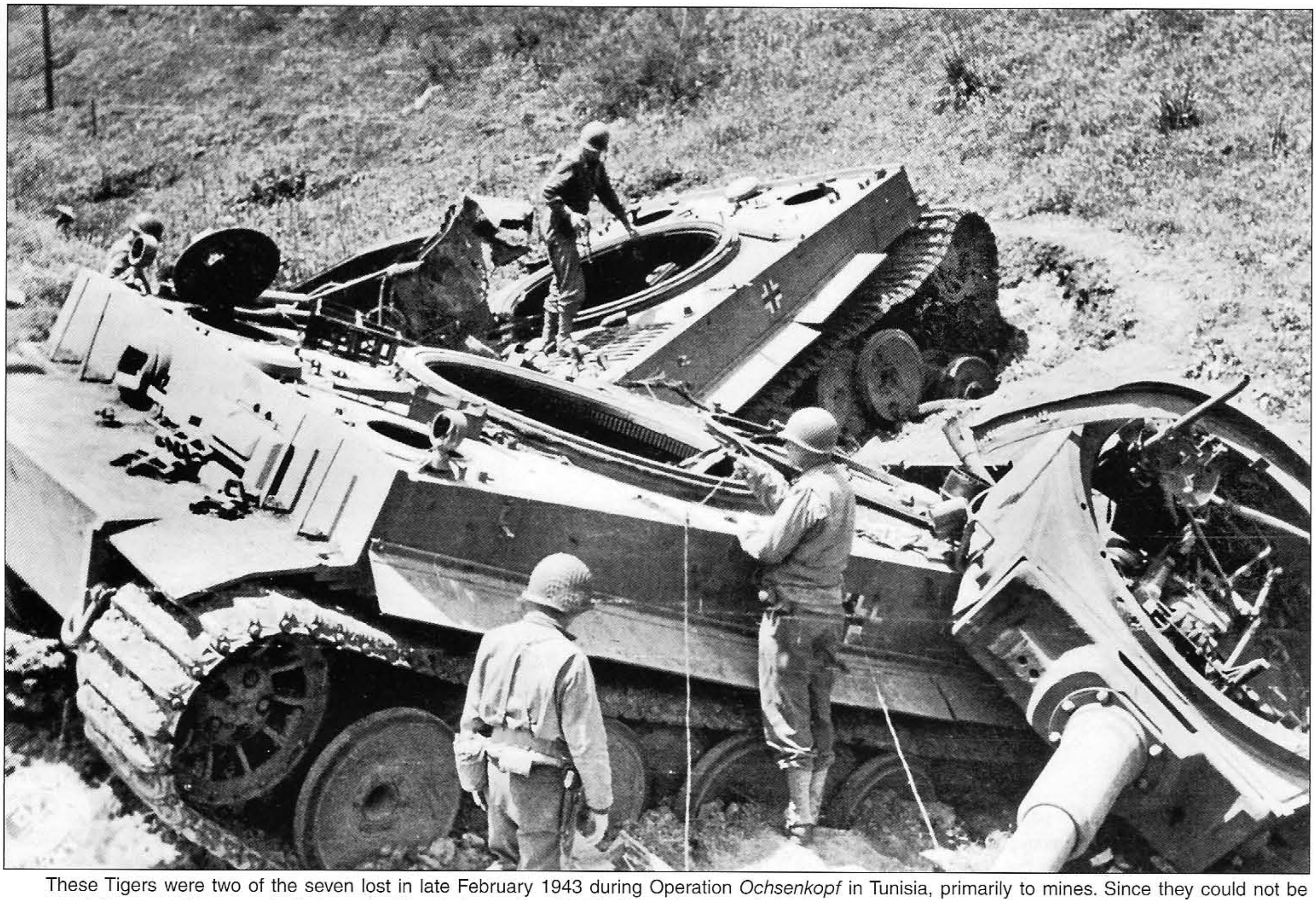
A M3 medium tank moves forward in Tunisia in the spring of 1943. The 1st Armored Division began using large tactical numbers on the turret late in the Tunisian campaign for easier recognition as seen here.



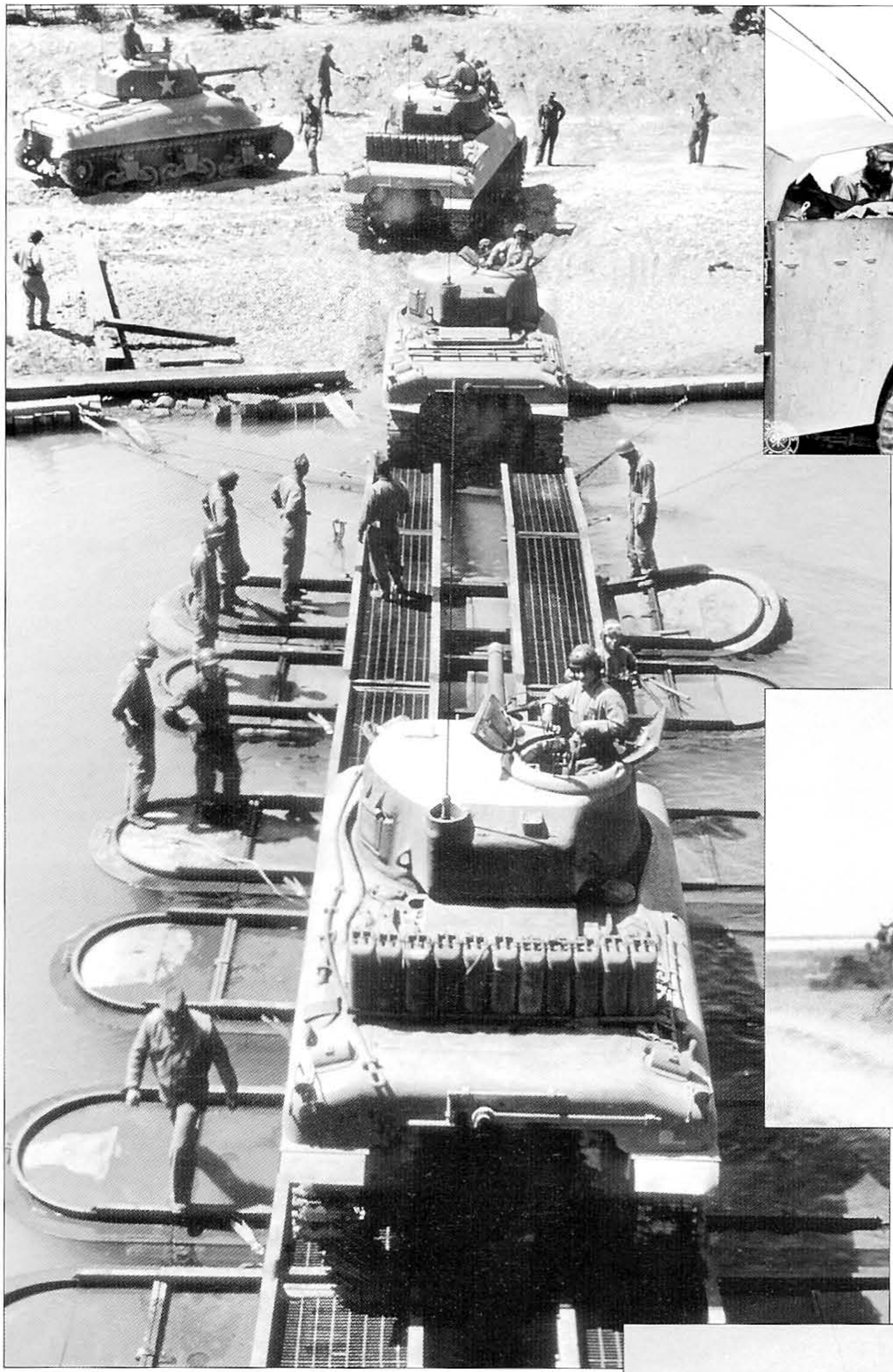
The M4A1 tank "Henry III" of Lt. Col. Henry Gardiner, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division. Gardiner lost two previous M4 medium tanks, including "Henry II" on 17 February at Sbeitla. The geometric design on the forward hull side is the tactical sign of the HQ Company of 2nd Battalion. (Col. Henry Gardiner)

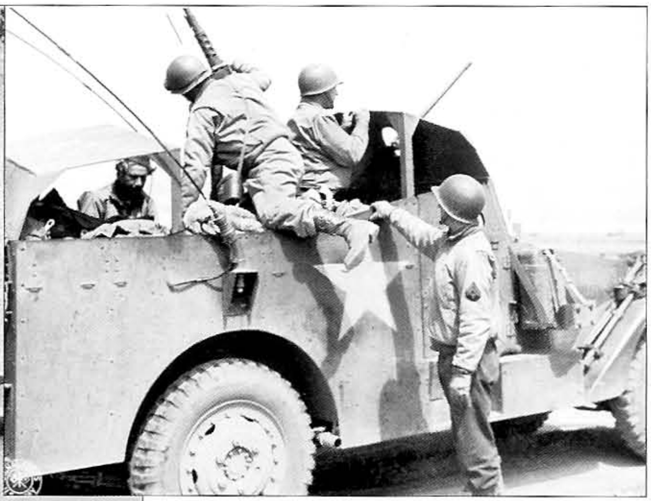


A M3A1 scout car passes by a wrecked German Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.G tank of Kampfgruppe Lueder lost during Operation *Ochsenkopf* on 28 February 1943.

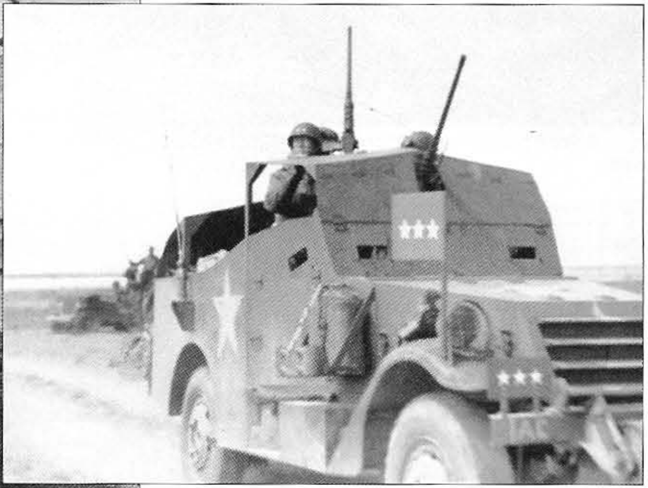


These Tigers were two of the seven lost in late February 1943 during Operation *Ochsenkopf* in Tunisia, primarily to mines. Since they could not be recovered, they were blown up by their crews. They belonged to sPz.Abt.501, elements of which were absorbed into Pz.Rgt.7 on 26 February 1943.



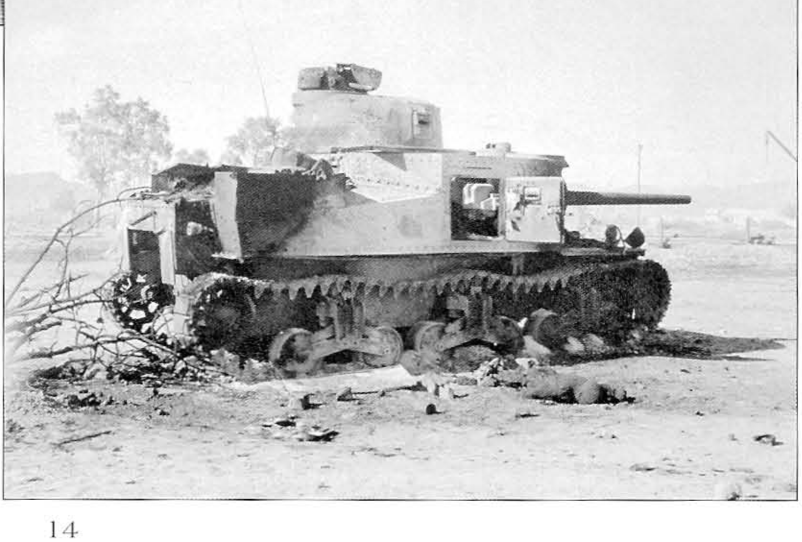


Gen. George S. Patton took over command of II Corps following the Kasserine pass fighting in March 1943. He used a modified M3A1 scout car with additional armored shields mounted on the front and rear as seen here. This vehicle had originally been built for him while he commanded the I Armored Corps.



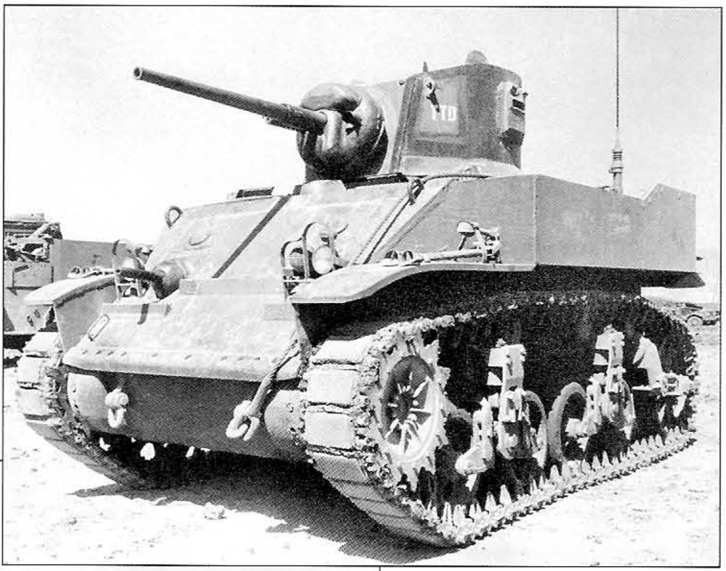
Another view of Patton's M3A1 command scout car. This shows the red command pennant of a lieutenant general; the II Corps pennant was carried on the other fender. Curiously enough, it still carries the bumper code of his previous command, the I Armored Corps.

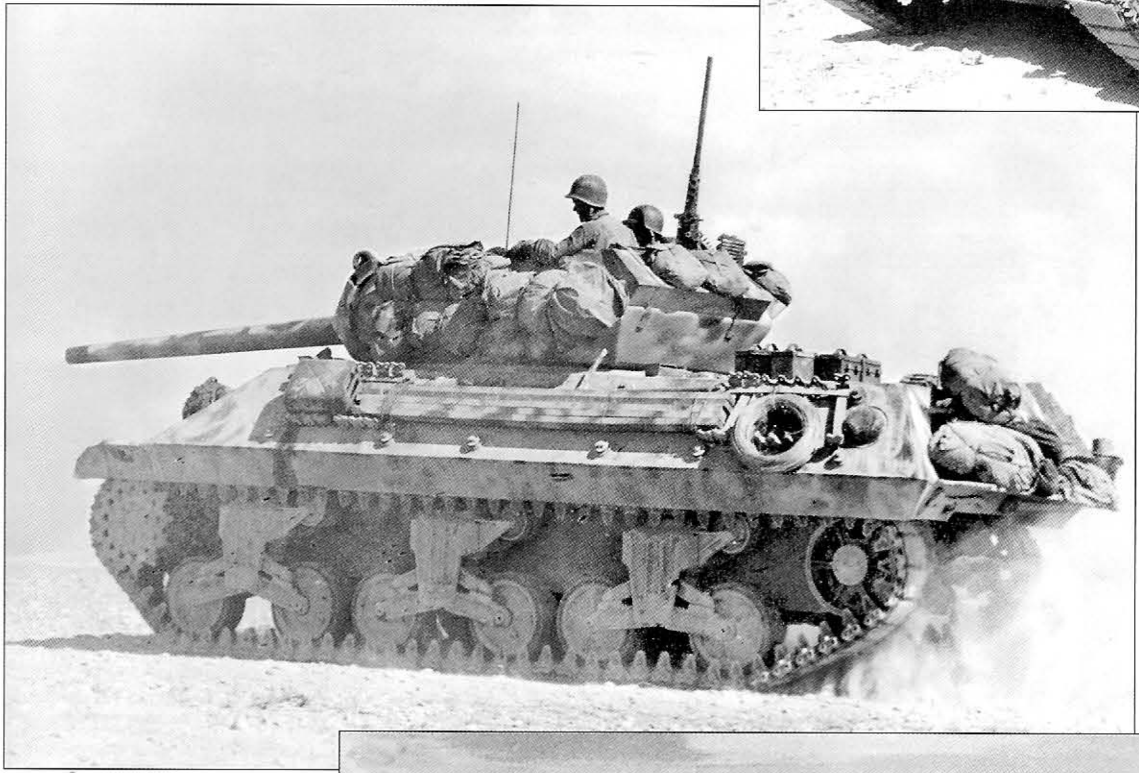
The 2nd Armored Division saw little fighting in North Africa after the initial November 1943 landings. Here, a column of M4A1 tanks of Co. F, 2nd Tank Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment are brought ashore from LSTs in Oran harbor on 6 April 1943 as part of the redeployment of the division in anticipation of the Sicily landings later in the summer. Note that the roof of the tank has been painted in white, a feature adopted by the 2nd Armored Division in 1942 as a means of aerial identification.



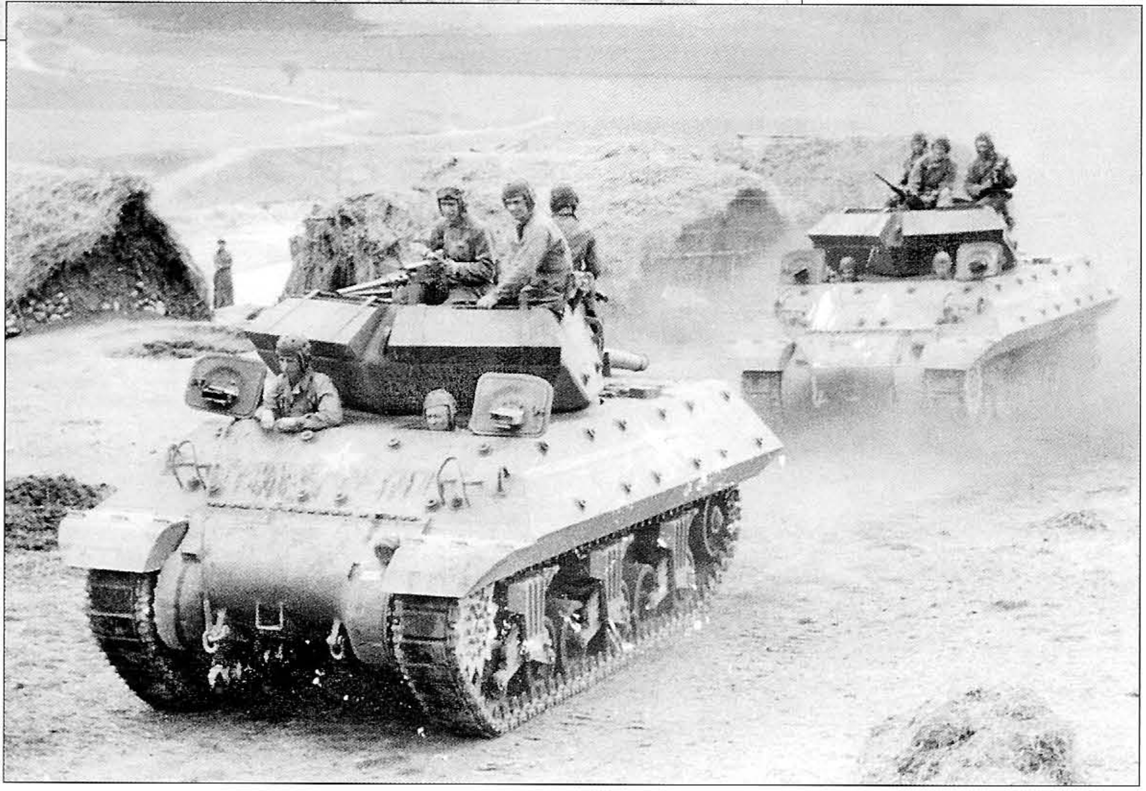
A late production M3 medium tank of the 1st Armored Division is seen here, burned out from the skirmishing around Sened in March 1943. It has the longer M3 gun and is modified like many tanks of the division with added plates over the rear engine filters.

The M5 light tank saw its combat debut in North Africa with the 70th Tank Battalion (Light). In addition, some of M5 light tanks were used by reconnaissance platoons in the new tank destroyer battalions. This M5 has one of the less common types of gun mantlets with the pronounced bulge over the gun tube. The TTD on the turret is a stencil from the Toledo Tank Depot where the tank was prepared for shipping.

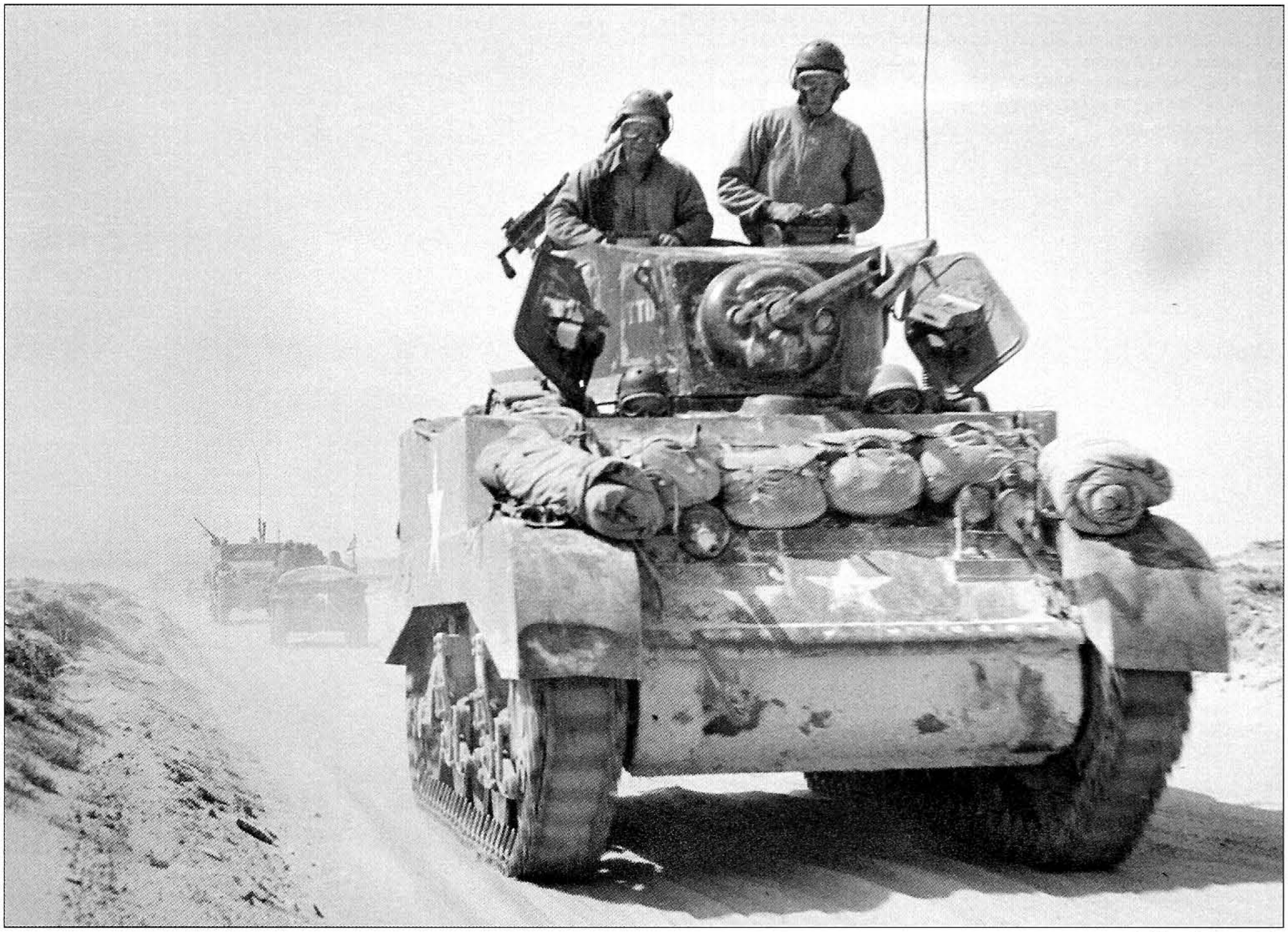




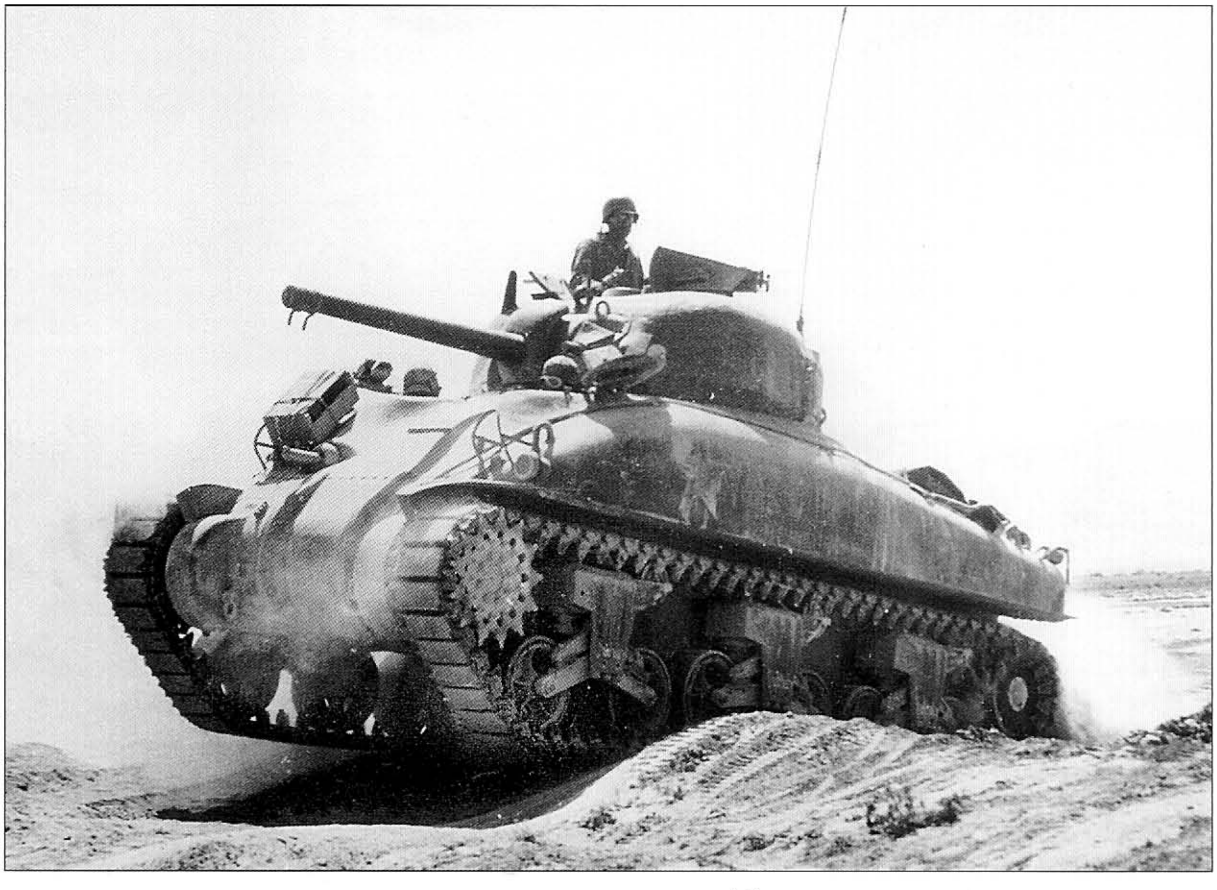
The M10 first went into combat service in North Africa in early 1943 with the 776th and 899th Tank Destroyer Battalions. These units made use of field expedient camouflage, consisting of local mud daubed over the vehicle to lighten the dark olive drab color of the vehicles.



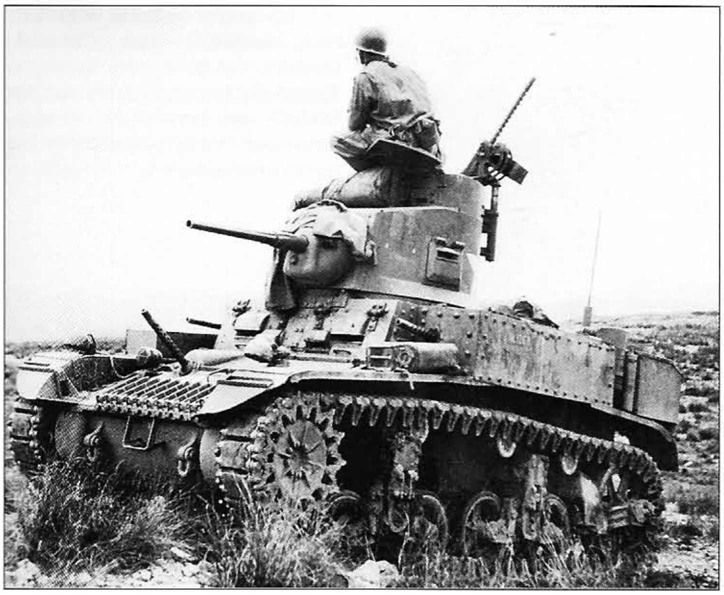
A pair of M10 3-in. gun motor carriages move to the front in Tunisia in the spring of 1943. These are fitted with the initial style of "quick-fix" turret counter-weights on the turret rear, need to correct the imbalance in the original turret design.



A M5 of the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion near Maknassy on 8 April 1943. The TTD on the turret is a stencil from the Toledo Tank Depot where the tank was prepared for shipping.

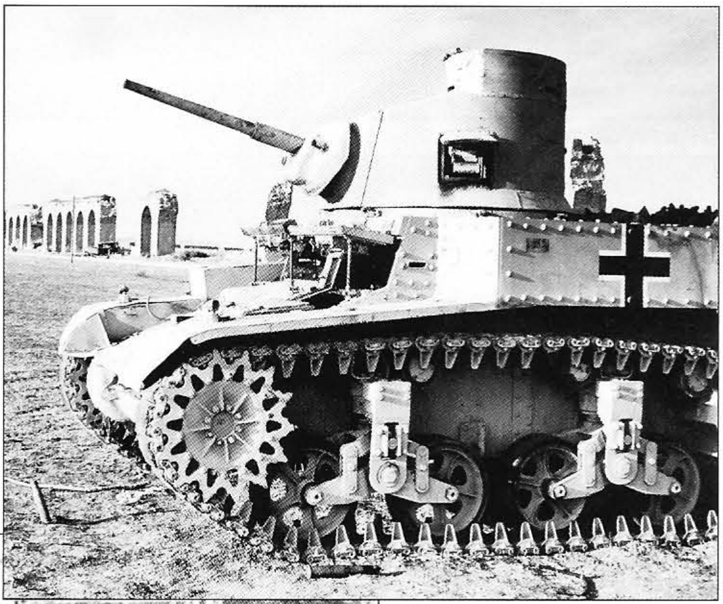


One of the new M4A1 medium tanks on operation in Tunisia. The 1st Armored Division gradually shifted to the M4A1 from the M3 medium as replacements due to combat attrition.



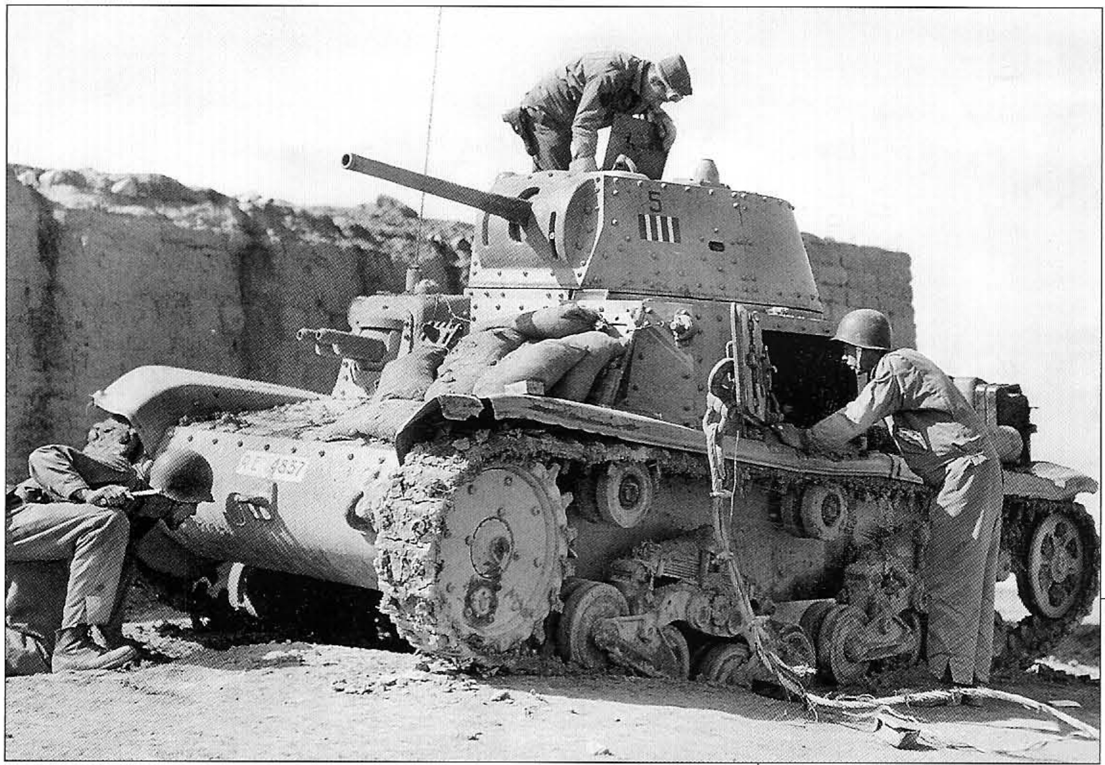
This is a M3 light tank of the 1st Armored Division with the third turret type, during operations near east of Maknassy, Tunisia in March 1943 with Djebel Naemia in the background. From the turret markings, this appears to be a tank of A Company, 13th Armored Regiment.

The tank crews of the Co. E, 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division stand to attention following a review after the Kasserine battles in March 1943. Another photo of this M4A1, numbered "9" appears earlier here.

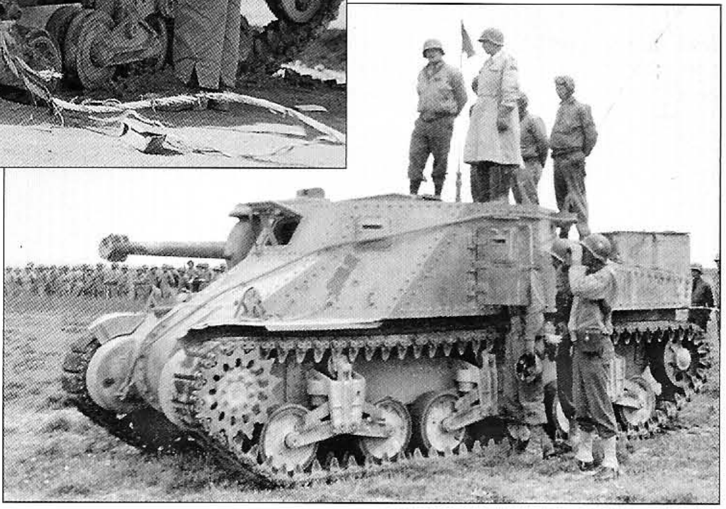


German forces in North Africa occasionally made use of captured US tanks. This M3 light tank was later recaptured by US forces at Cheylas, south of Tunis, in 1943. It was originally captured from US forces, repainted, and remarked in German insignia.

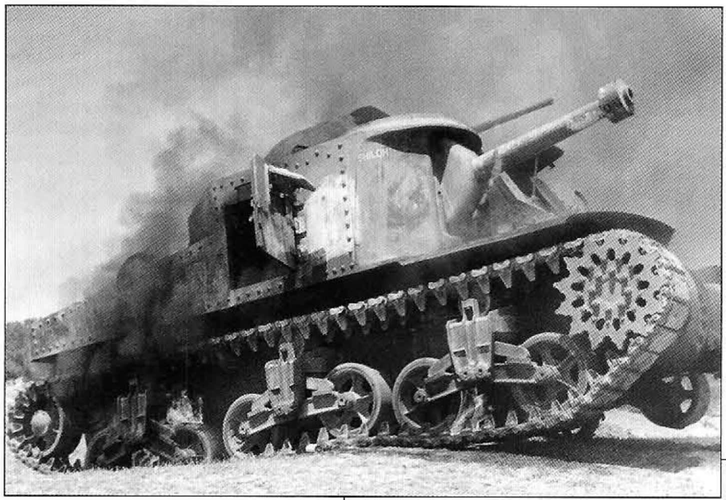
A Pz.Kpfw.IV tank waits for orders while on the streets of Tunis in March 1943 during the final phase of the fighting in North Africa. (MHI)



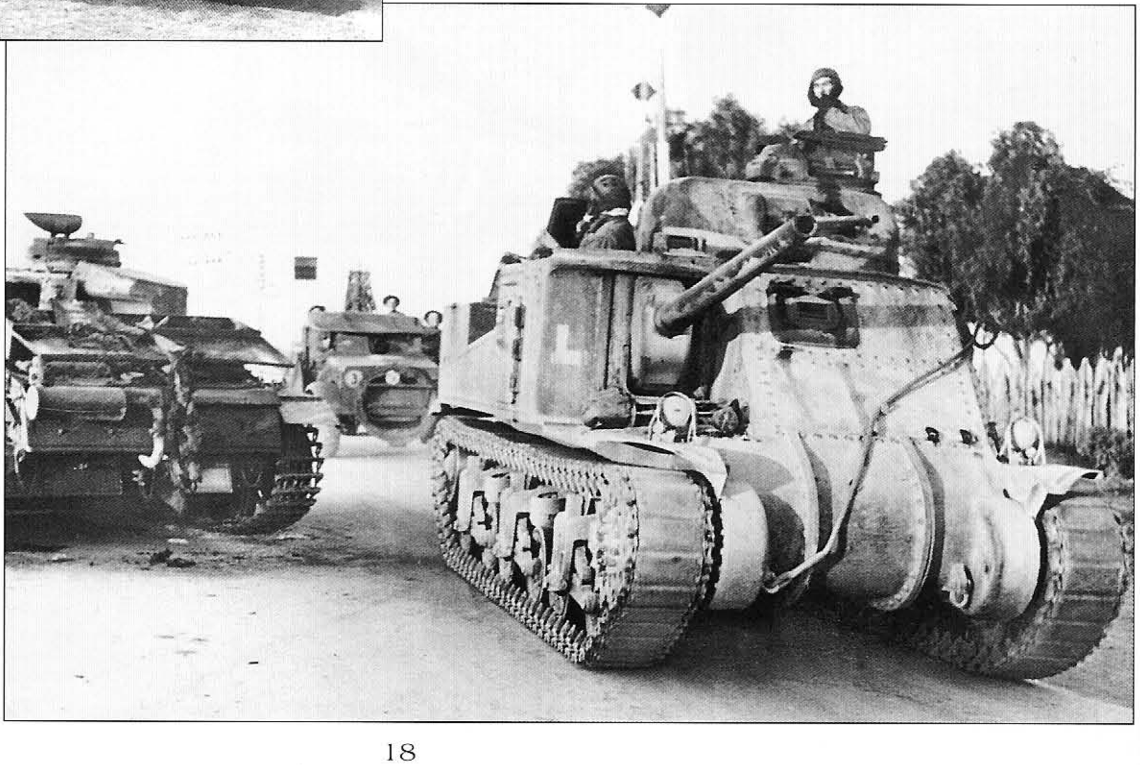
US troops examine a M14/41 tank, probably from Centauro Division, lost during the fighting in Tunisia. By this stage of the war, the M14/41 was hopelessly obsolete, but was all that was available for the Italian armored units.



An old M3 medium tank named "Alamo" was converted into an improvised command tank for the headquarters of the 13th Armored Regiment by removing the turret. Here, the new divisional after Kasserine, Maj. Gen. E, Harmon, uses "Alamo" as a vantage point during a review of the unit.

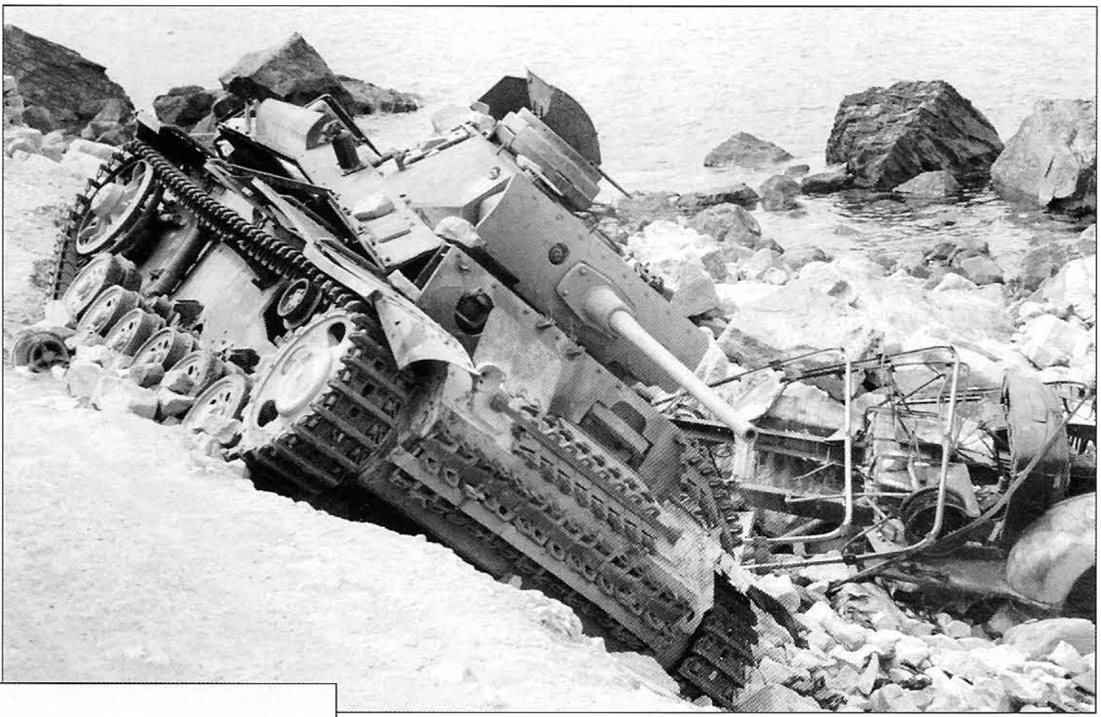


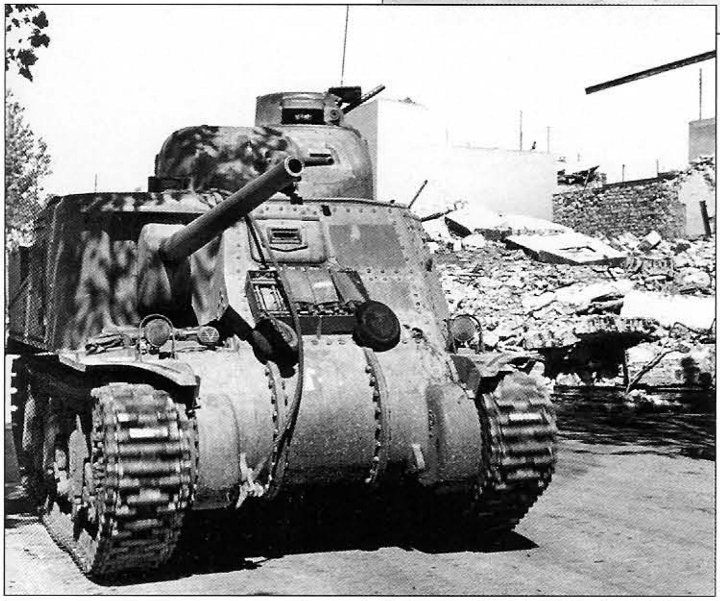
A M3 medium tank named "Shiloh" of Co. I, 13th Armored Regiment burns following the fighting near Mateur on 3 May 1943. The Germans had abandoned the town, and most of the losses that day were due to mines. This tank has crew names painted on the gun barrels and the 75mm gun is fitted with a barrel counterweight at the end.



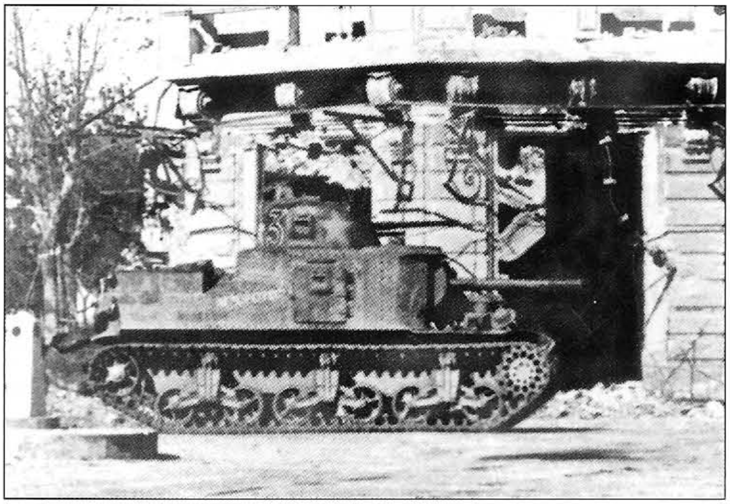
A M3 medium tank of Co. F, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division passes a derelict Pz.Kpfw.III in the outskirts of Bizerte during the final phase of the operations in Tunisia in early May 1943. A British lorry can be seen behind it.

This Pz.Kpfw.III lies abandoned by the seashore near Bizerte in May 1943 following the collapse of the German defenses. Judging from the superstructure, it appears to have been blown up by an internal detonation.

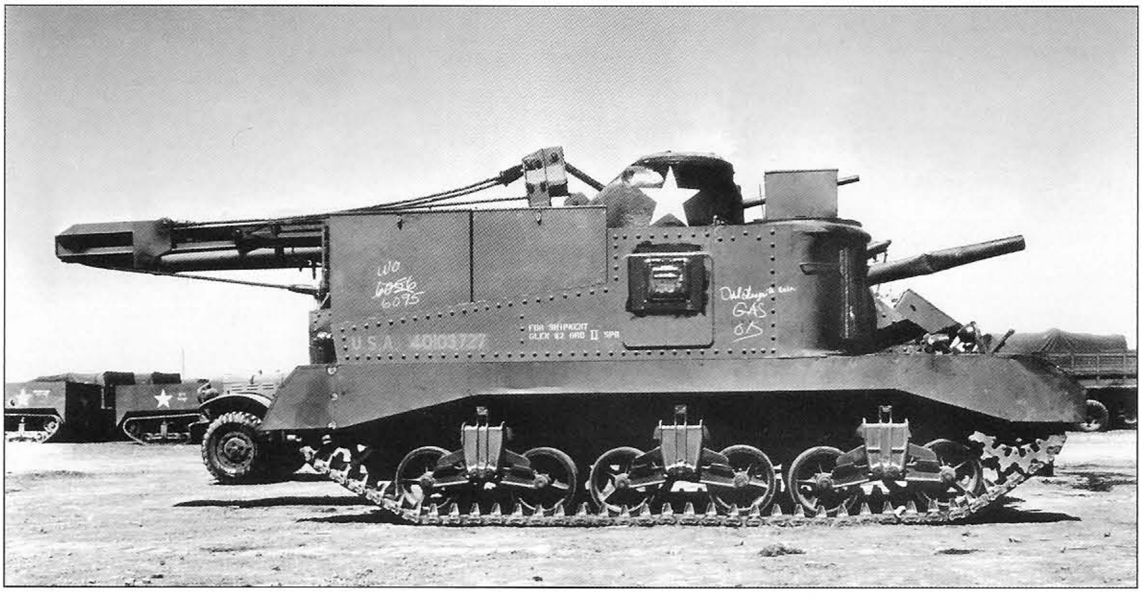




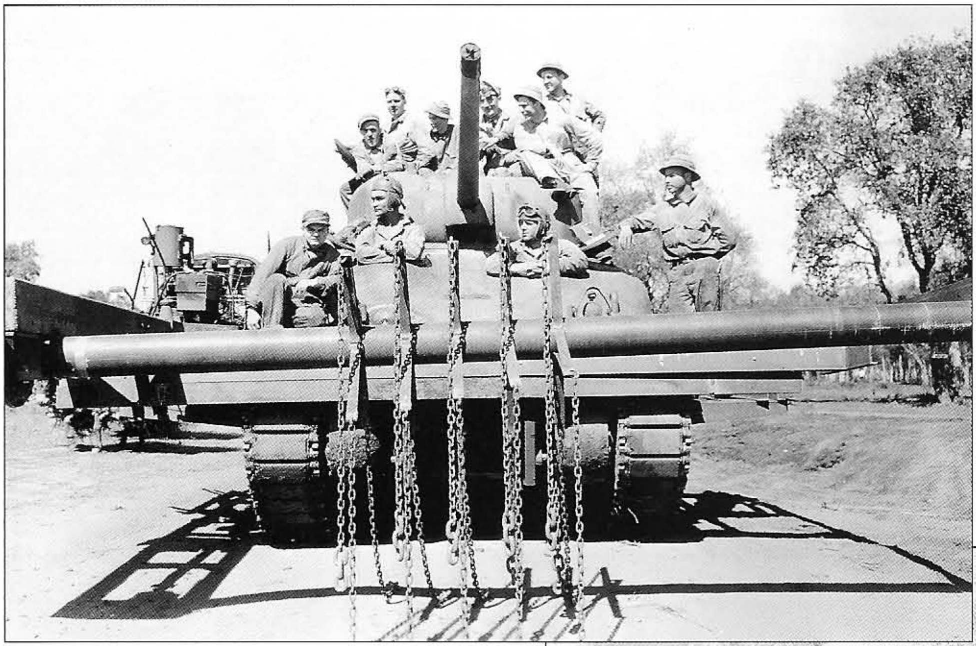
A M3 medium tank of CCA, 1st Armored Division in the ruins of Bizerte on 7 May 1943. This is a late production M3 tank with the longer 75mm gun and the grouser stowage box on the hull front.



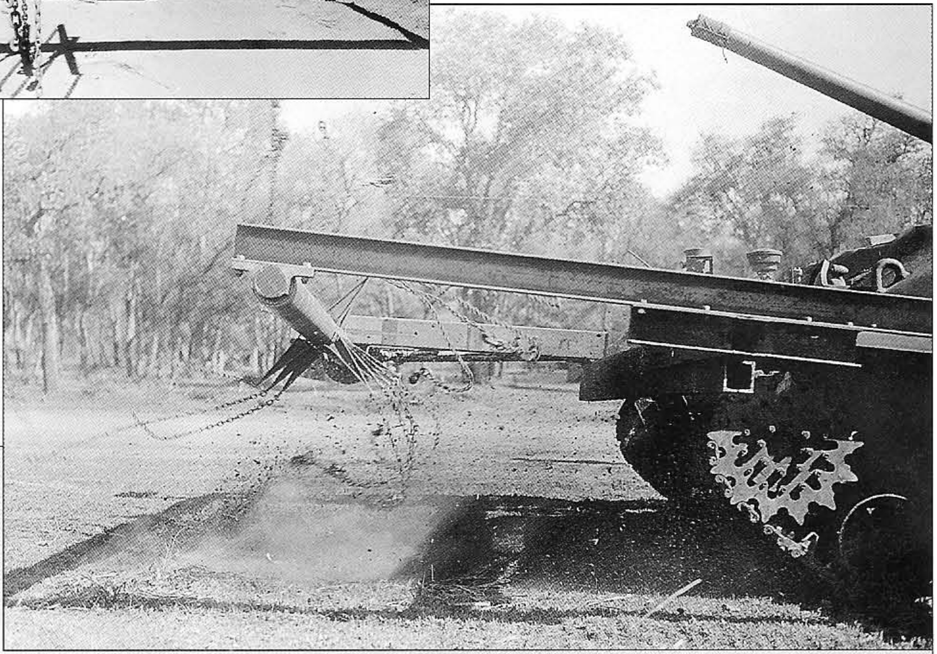
A M3 medium tank of Combat Command A (CCA), 1st Armored Division moves through the ruins of Bizerte on 7 May 1943 in the final phase of the Tunisian campaign. The large tactical numbers on the turret had become common on surviving M3 medium tanks by this stage of the fighting.



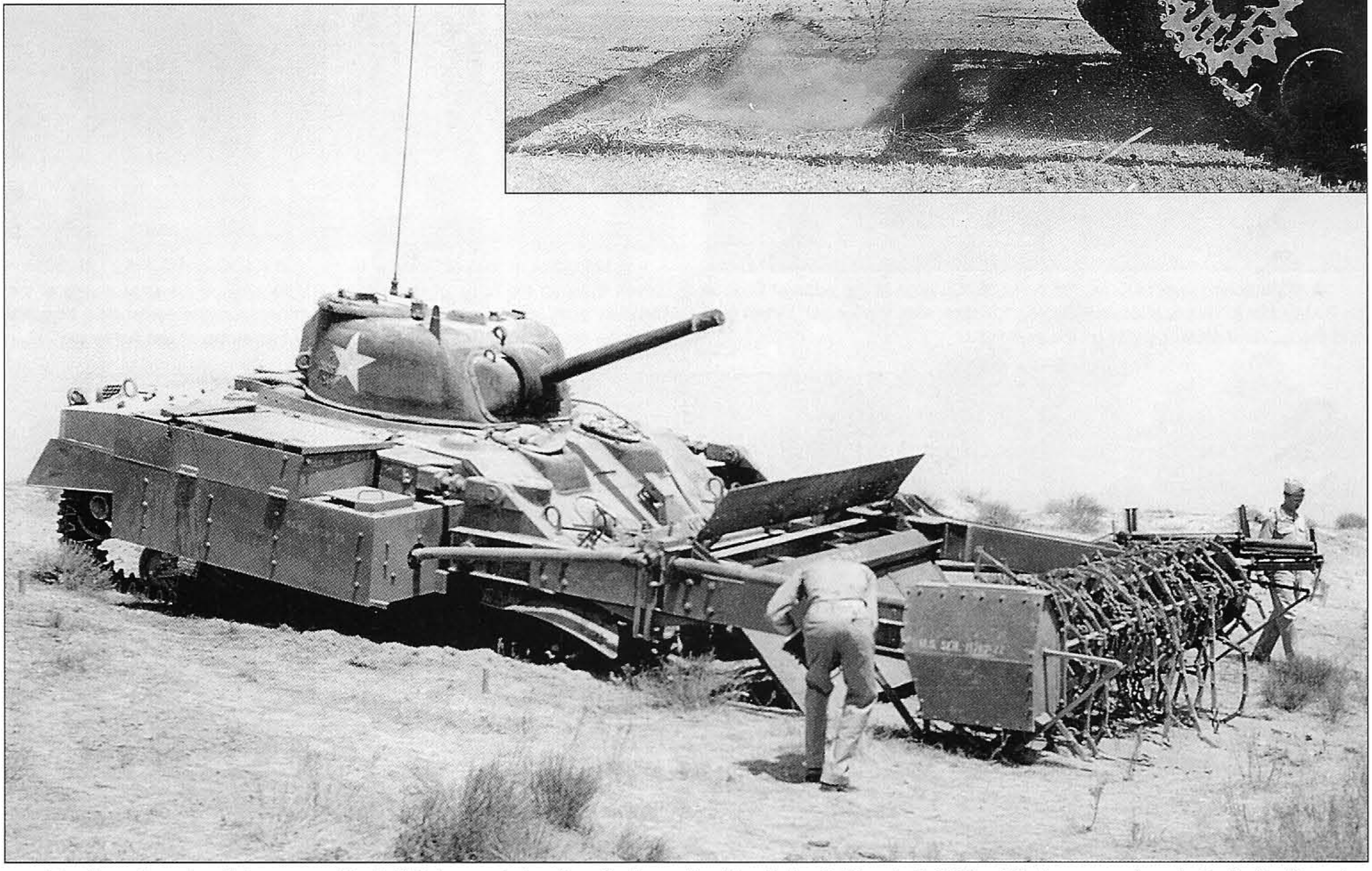
One of the newer items of equipment to appear in North Africa prior to the end of the campaign was the T2 tank recovery vehicle, later designated as the M31. It is seen here in Oran in May 1943 prior to departing for the Sicily operation. It was based on the M3 medium tank, and the 75mm gun in the hull was in fact, a fake, as can be determined by its damaged condition.



After having seen British Flail tanks in operation, the 89th Ordnance Battalion attempted to create its own version using a M4A1 medium tank in March 1943. This field improvisation was not robust enough and Britain later provided the US Army with a number of flail tanks for anti-mine operations in 1944.

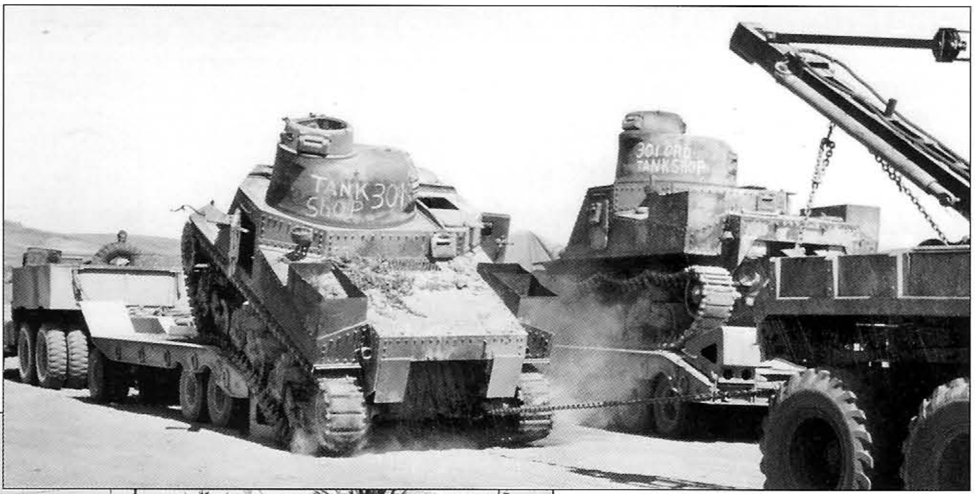


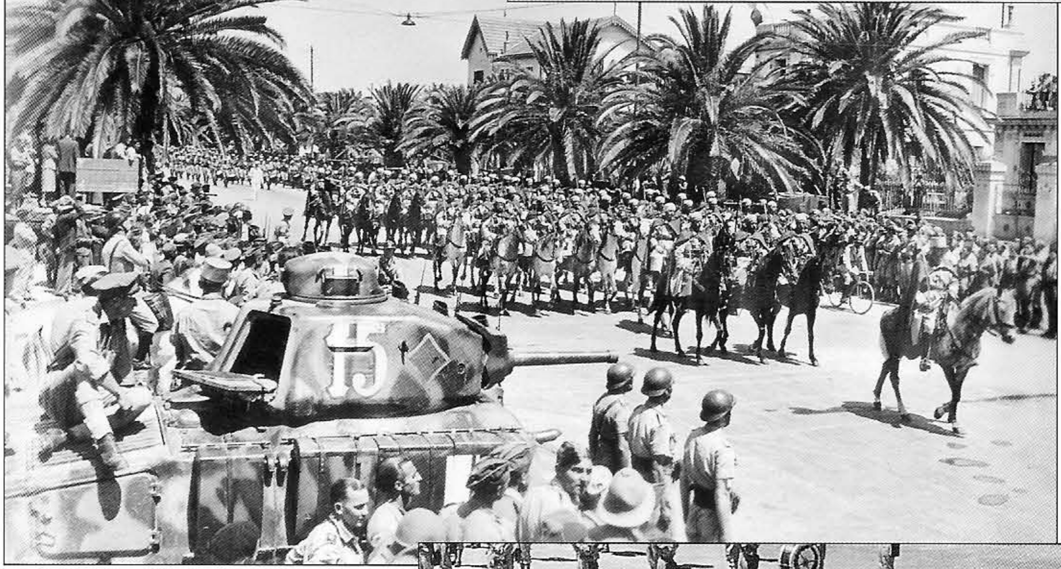
This is another view of the 89th Ordnance Battalion's improvised flail showing details of the flail assembly itself. It proved too flimsy, and the US Army used the British Scorpion instead.



The Scorpion mine flail was used by British forces during the attacks on the Mareth line in March 1943. The US Army experimented with the Scorpion mine flail in North Africa in the summer of 1943. A small number were used by US tank battalions in Italy in 1944 with mixed results.

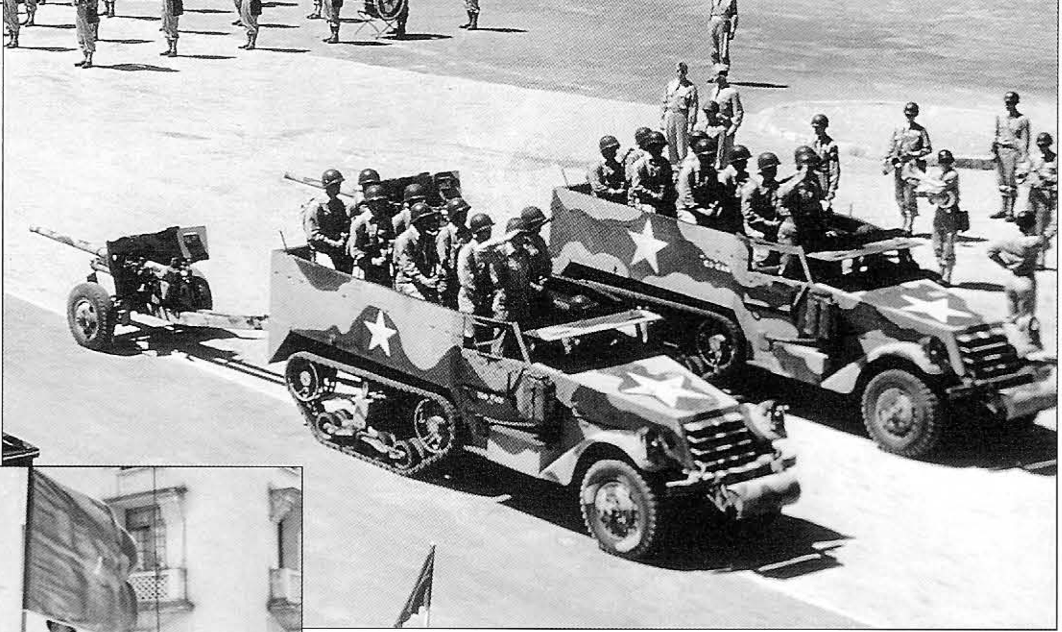
A pair of M3 medium tanks knocked out during the fighting around Mateur are brought back to the workshop of the 301st Ordnance Battalion on 2 June 1943. Notice that the tank to the left has had improvised armor fitted behind the two engine air filters on the rear.





A victory parade is held by Allied troops in Tunis in June 1943, with a French cavalry unit passing in review. The Somua S-35 cavalry tank in the foreground belongs to the 12e Regiment des Chasseurs d'Afrique, one of the French colonial units that joined the Allies. Squadrons from this unit saw fighting against the Germans in Tunisia in the spring of 1943, and after being re-equipped in 1943, this regiment fought in France in 1944 as part of the French 2nd Armored Division.

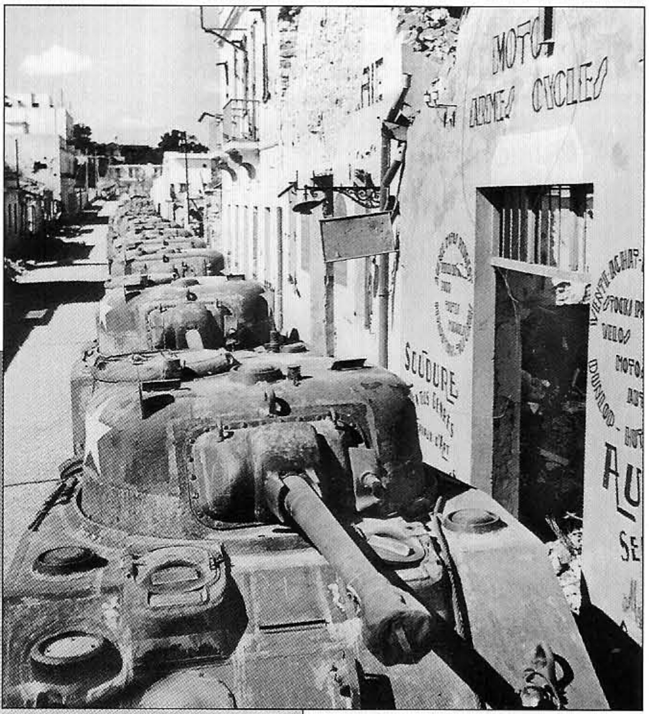
A column of M3 halftracks towing the new M1A3 57mm anti-tank gun of the 34th Division parade in Port Lyautey, Morocco on the 4th of July 1943. The infantry had used the 37mm anti-tank gun for the Tunisia campaign, and only began to receive the new 57mm guns prior to the Sicily landings.

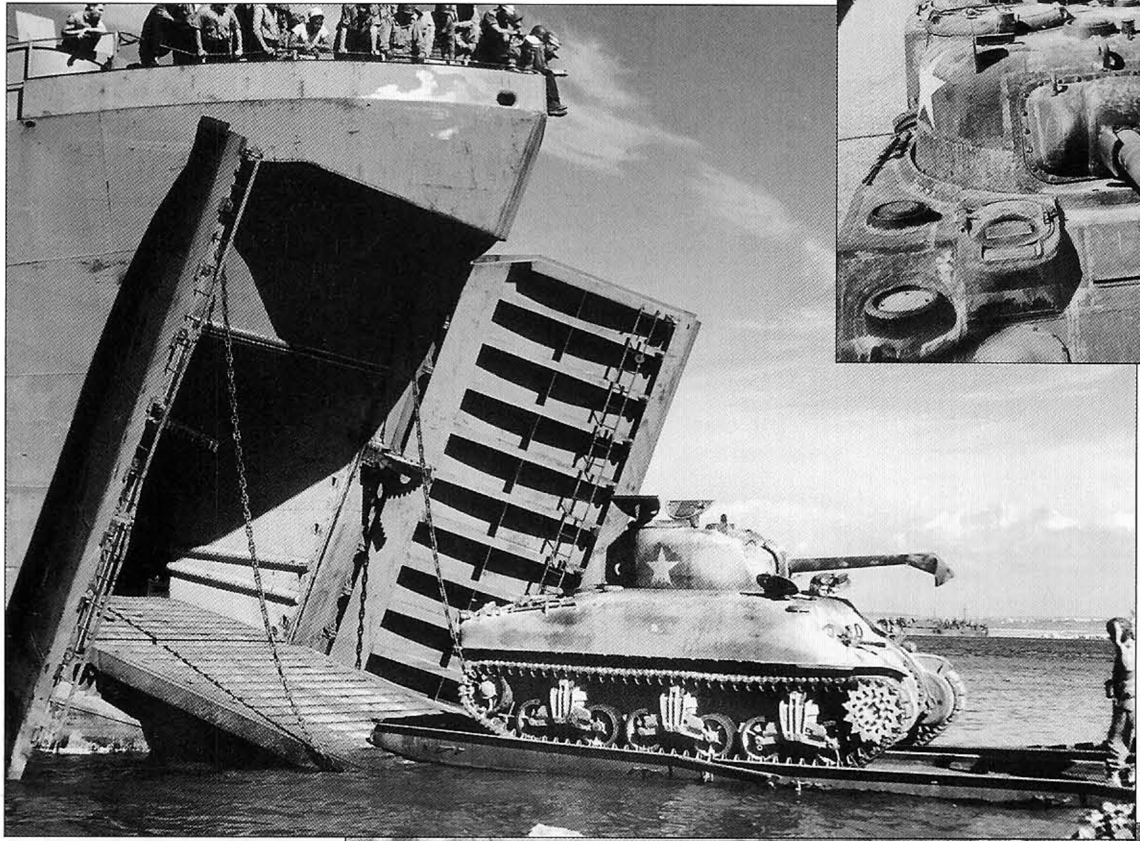


SCALI
AUSSURES
HQ

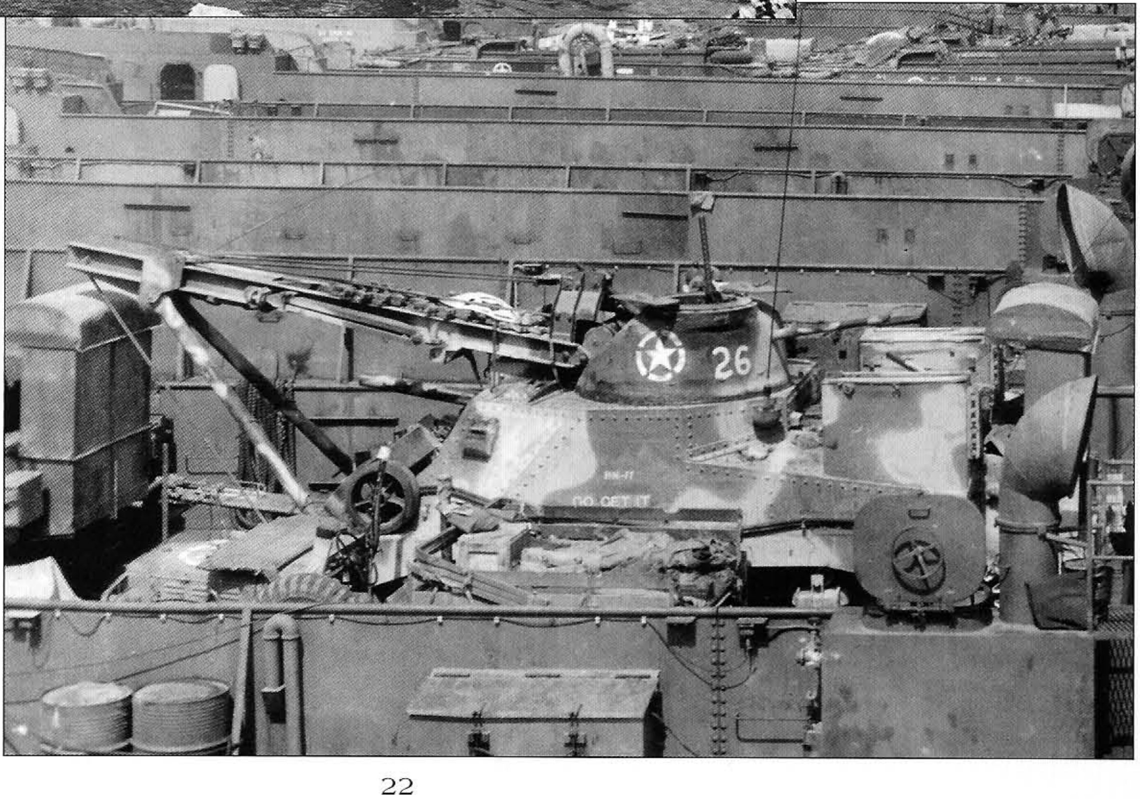
A M3A1 scout car named "Vickie" of the headquarters of the 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division is seen on parade in June 1943 following the end of the fighting in Tunisia.

A column of M4 medium tanks are parked along a street in Bizerte in the spring of 1943 prior to being loaded on board ships for Operation Husky, the landings in Sicily.

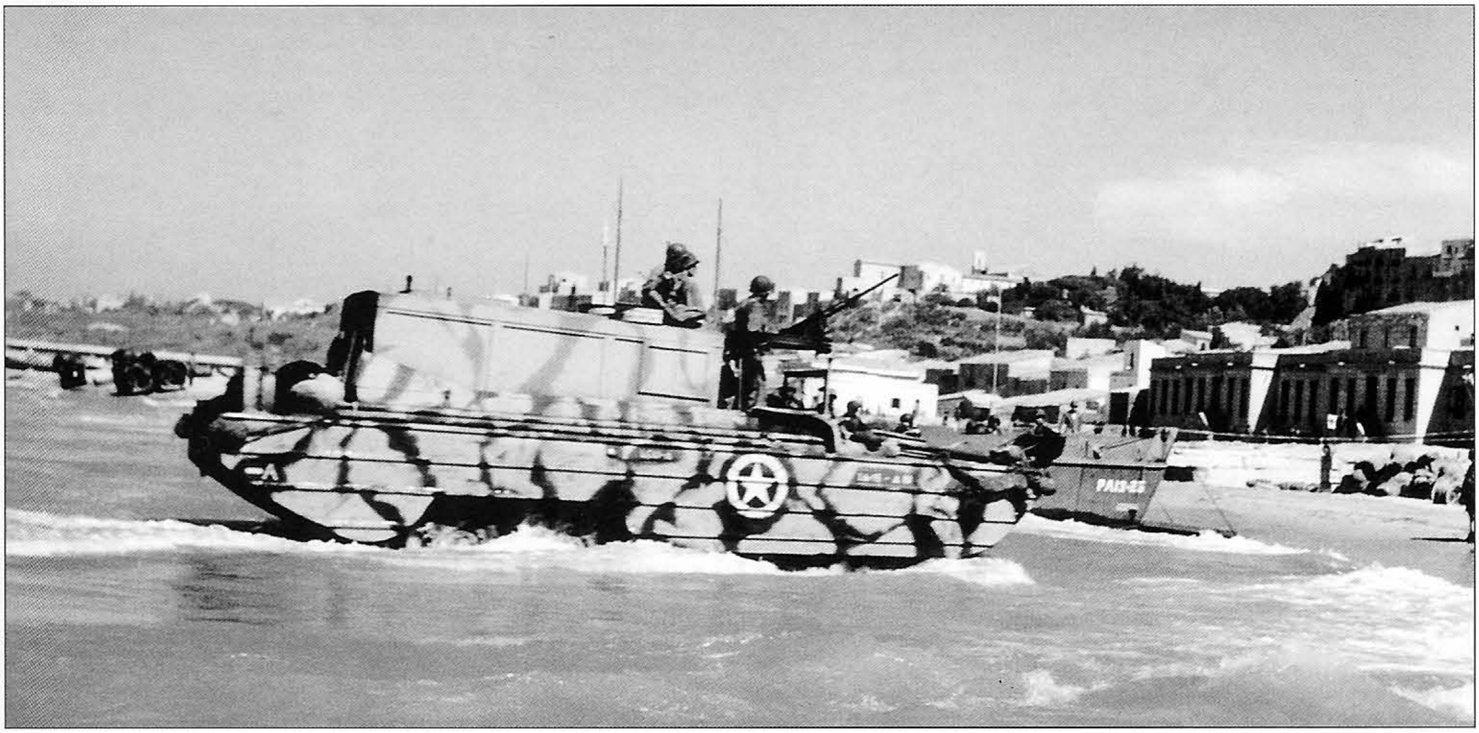




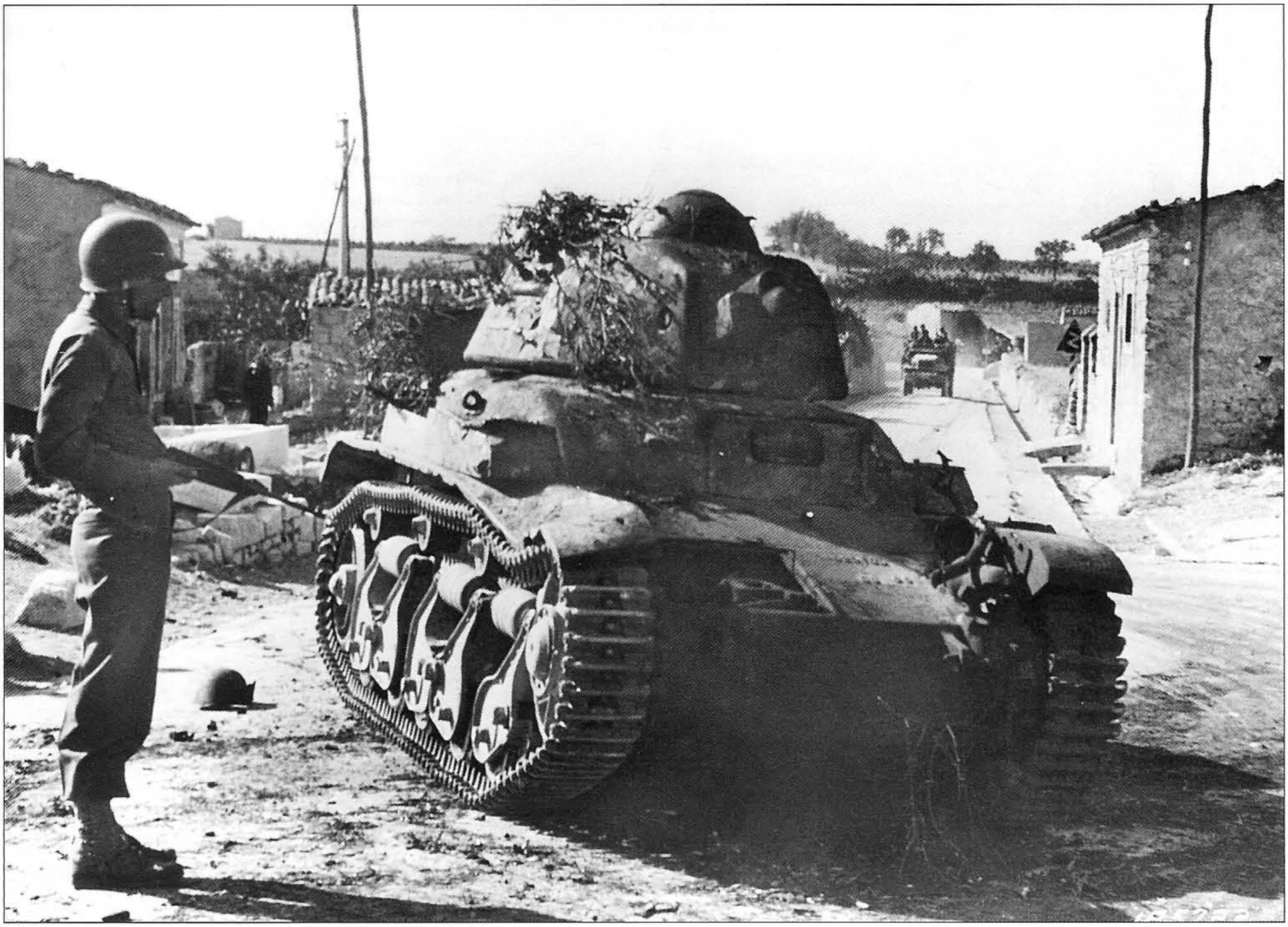
The 2nd Armored Division saw little combat in North Africa after the original November 1942 landings. Here, a M4A1 of 1/66th Armored Regiment is loaded into a LST at Oran harbor in preparation for the Sicily landings. It is already painted in the two-tone camouflage prescribed for the operation, but lacks the white circle around the star.



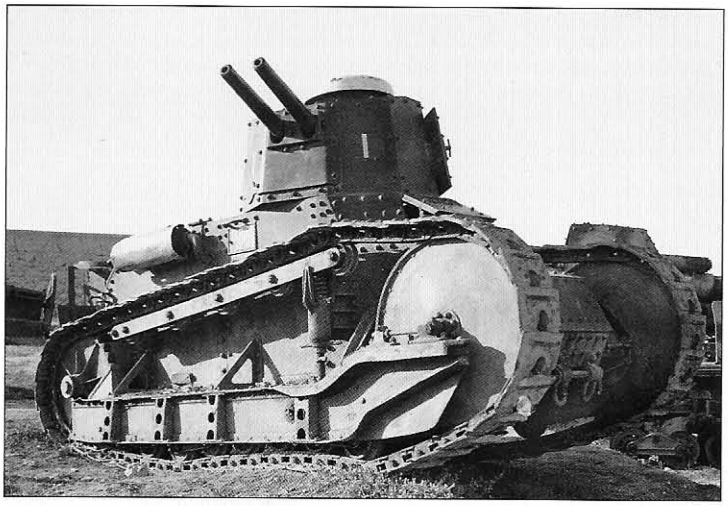
A T2 tank recovery vehicle sits in the hold of a landing craft in a North African port days before the Sicily landing. It is already camouflage painted in the Operation Husky scheme. This provides a good view of the mushroom shaped deep wading trunks built by the Fifth Army Invasion Training Center (5AITC) in Oran in April 1943, first used during the Sicily landings.



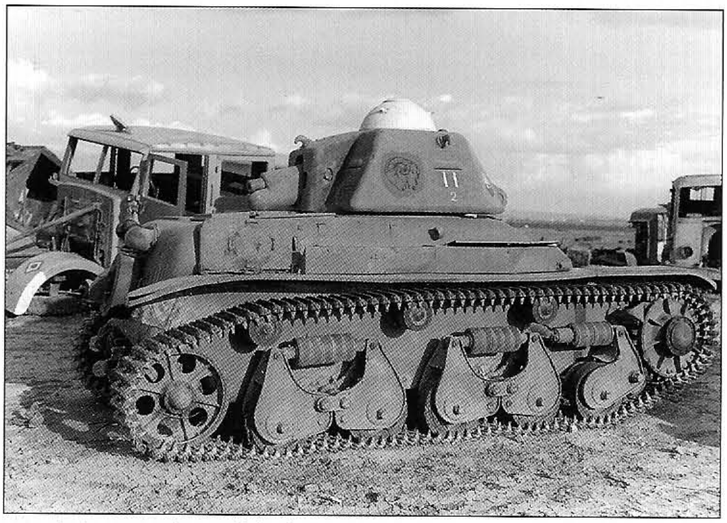
A camouflaged DUKW amphibious truck comes ashore at Gela during the landings on Sicily which began on 10 July 1943. The DUKW was the secret weapon of the Allies on Sicily as it permitted re-supply across beaches which did not have harbor facilities, permitting the Allies to land in unanticipated and undefended areas.



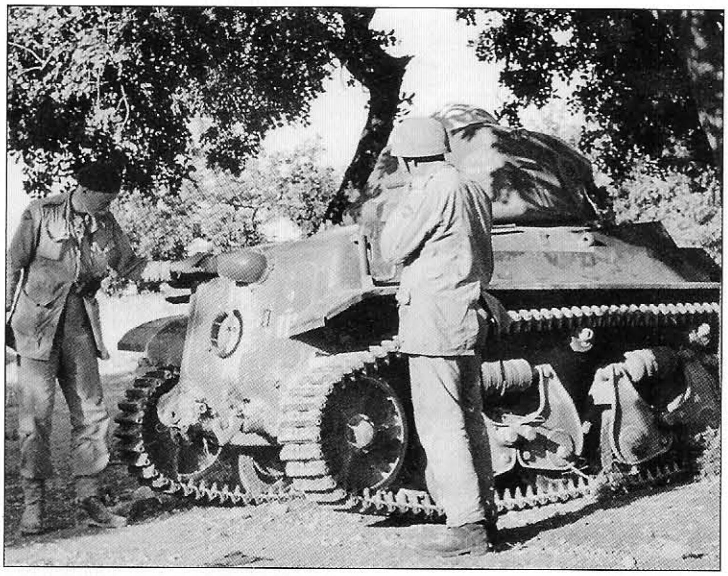
The first armored attack against the Gela landing site was by the Italian Mobile Group E. On 10 July 1943, thirty-two Renault R-35 light tanks of the 101st Battalion, 131st Tank Regiment attempted to fight their way into Gela, but were badly beaten up by naval gunfire before encountering Darby's Rangers in the town.



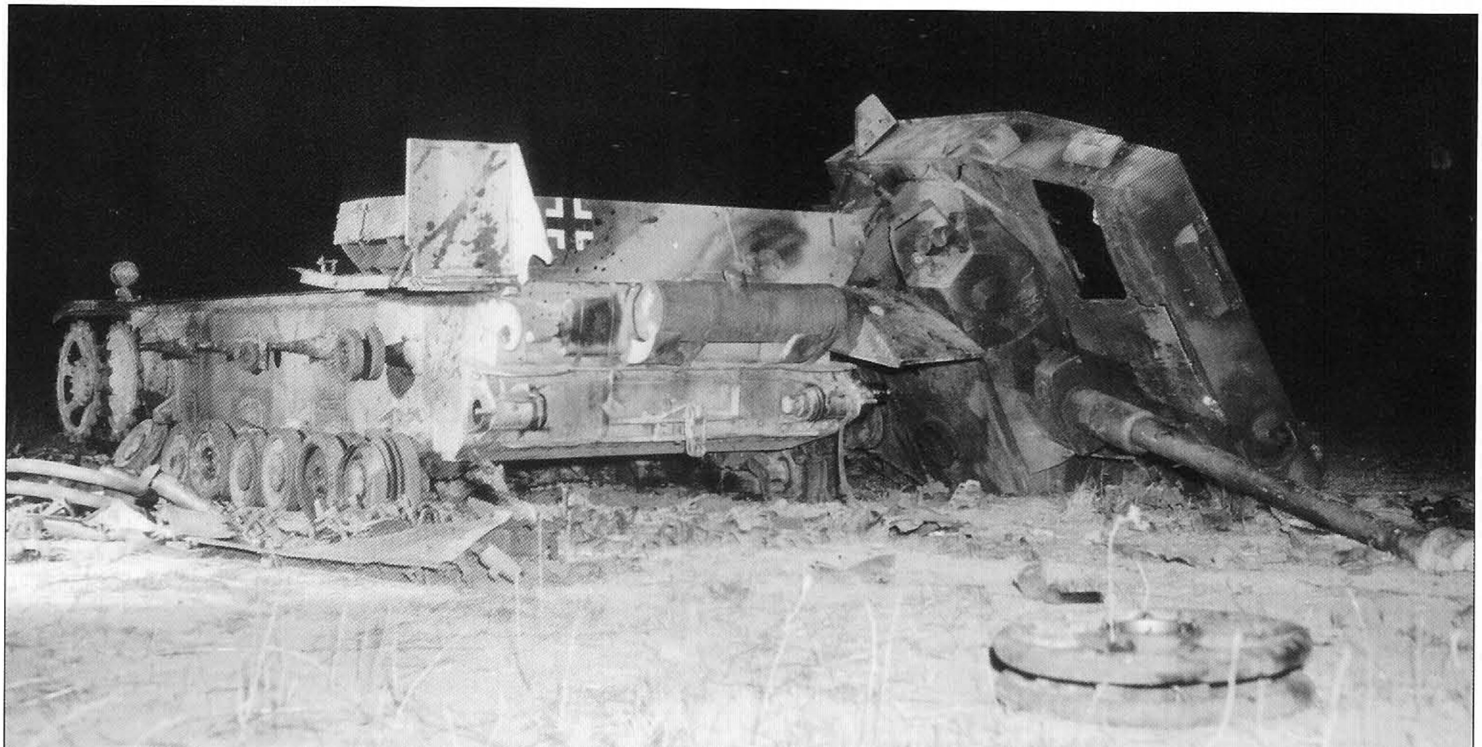
Another of the tank types used by Italian forces on Sicily was the obsolete Fiat 3000 Mod.21, an Italian derivative of the World War I Renault FT. One company of these was dug in as pillboxes and another company including this tank was attached to Mobile Group E.



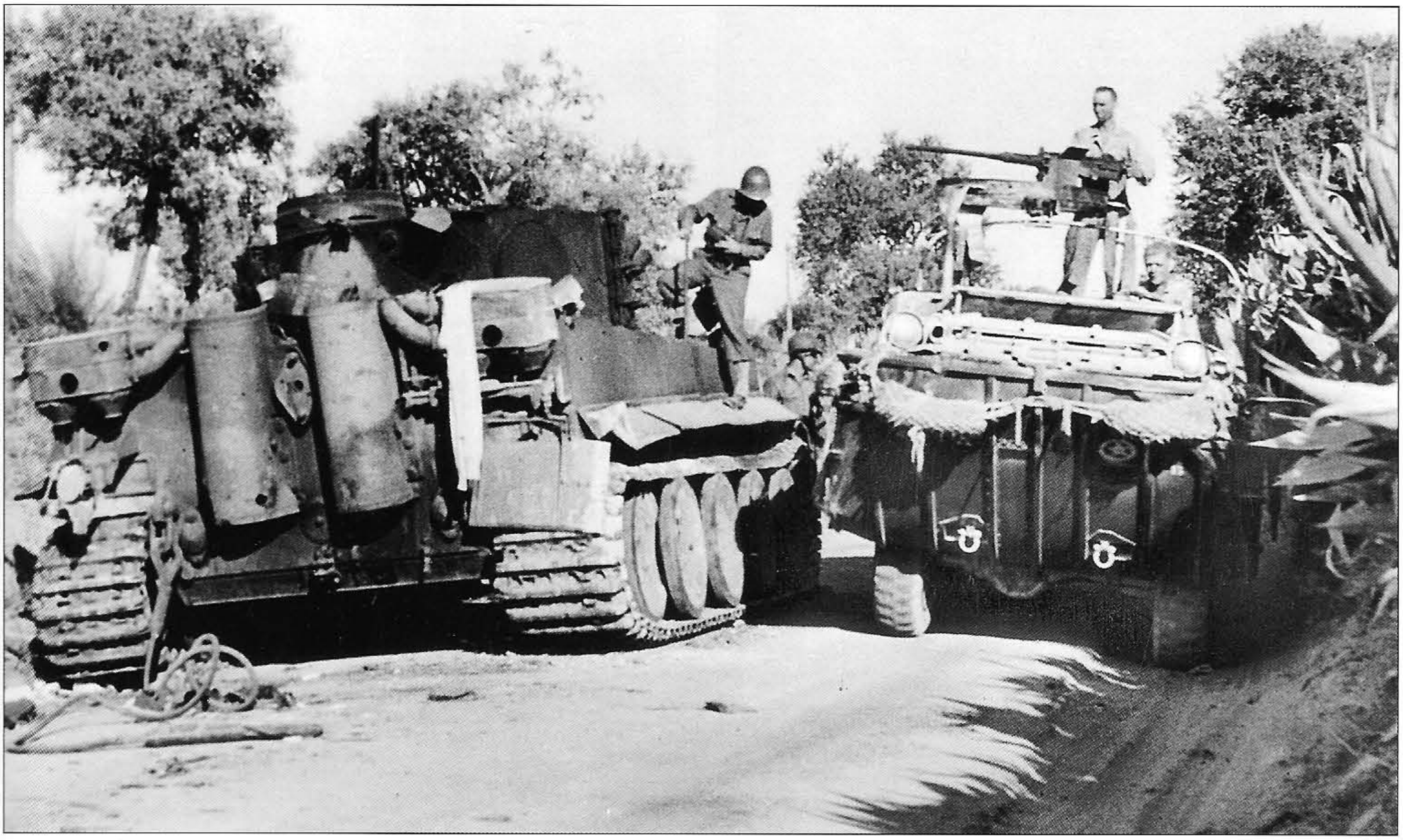
A close-up of one of the Italian R-35 tanks of the 131st Tank Regiment with its distinctive ram's head insignia on the turret. The cupola was painted white in lieu of the usual Italian white air recognition roundel.



Canadian troops examine one of the Italian Renault R-35 tanks of Mobile Group F that was destroyed in a later skirmish near Rosolini on 11 July 1943 with Canadian tanks.

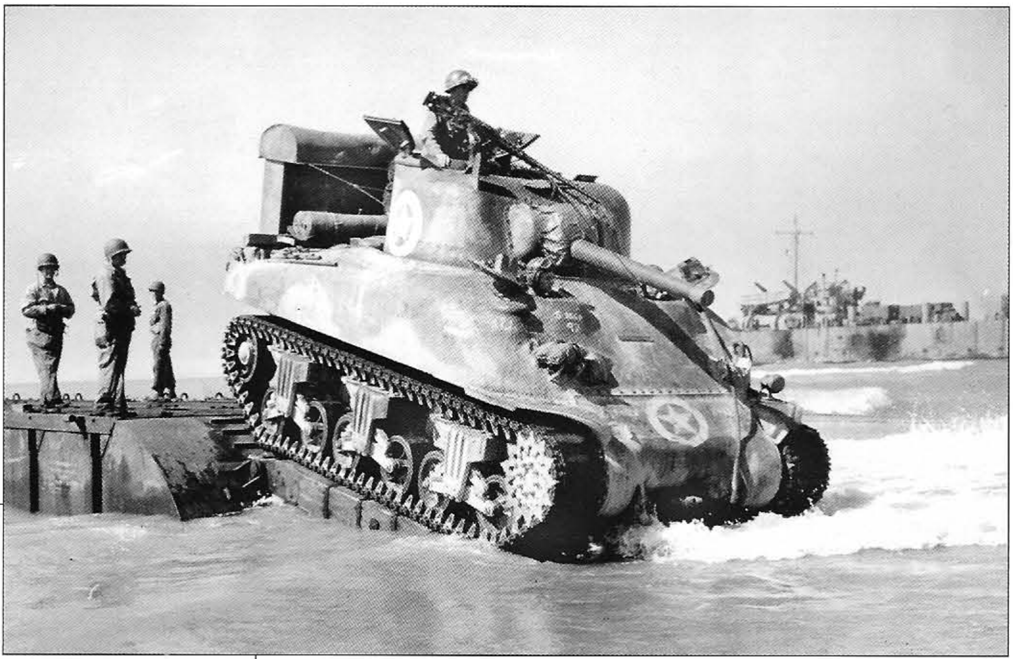


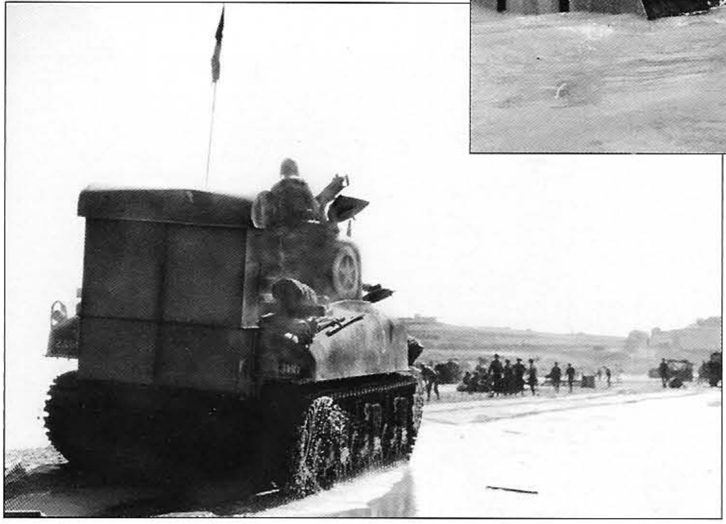
Following the initial Italian attacks on Gela, the Hermann Göring Panzer Division attempted to push the US forces back into the sea in the series of armored attacks. However, the attacks met stiff resistance from the infantry and were pummeled from heavy gunfire from warships off-shore as is suggested by this demolished Pz.Kpfw.IV near the Gela beach-head.



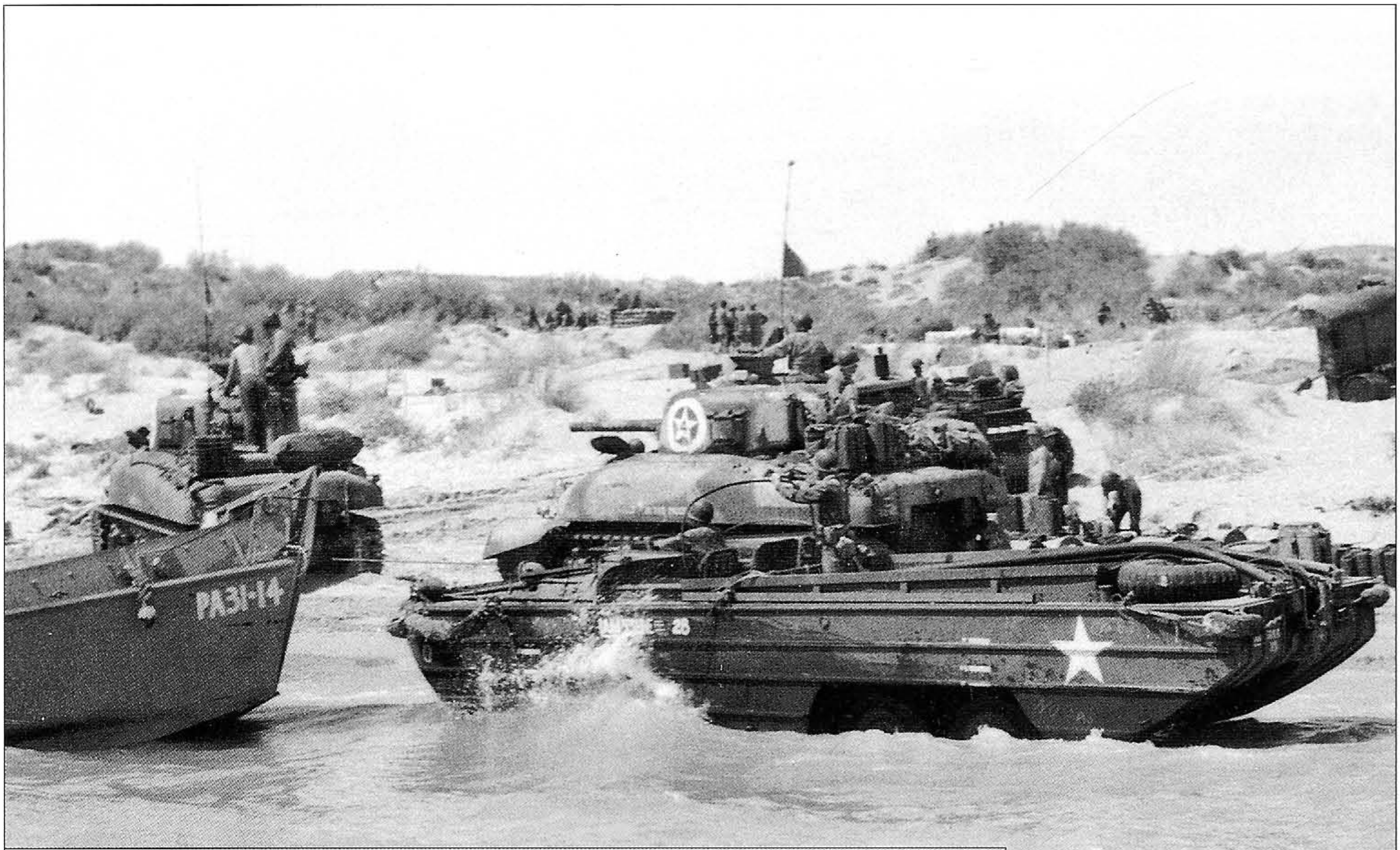
A DUKW passes by a burned out Tiger from the 2/sPz.Abt.504 which supported the Hermann Göring Panzer Division. It was knocked out during the fighting near the Gela beaches.

A M4A1 of the 3rd Battalion HQ, 67th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Division comes ashore on Sicily. It is fitted with the 5AITC deep wading trunks locally manufactured in North Africa which had a different shape than those used later in France in 1944. Note also the water-proofing over the gun mantlet and other openings.

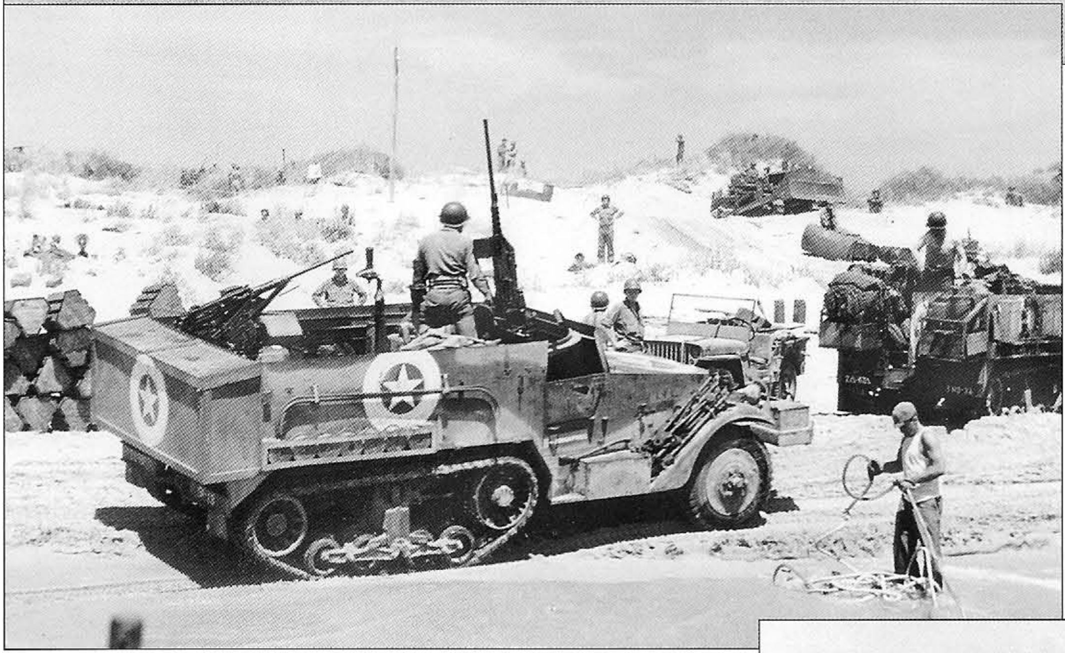




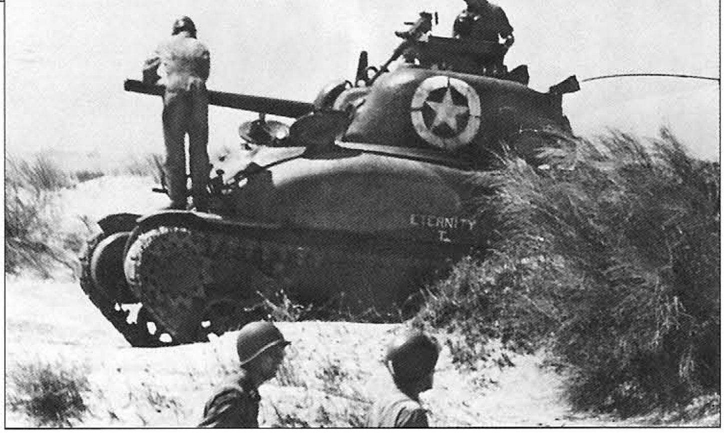
A rear view of a M4A1 from the 3rd Battalion HQ, 67th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Division landing on Sicily. This provides a very good view of the 5AITC wading trunks used during the Sicily landings.



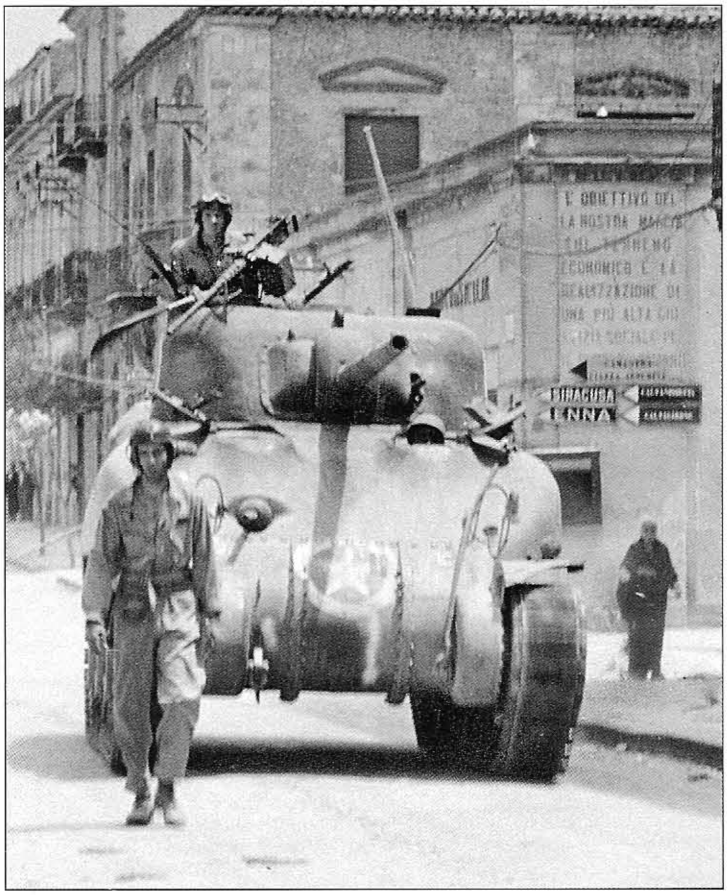
A view of the beach-head area with a pair of M4A1 tanks of the 67th Armored Regiment already ashore, and a LCVP and DUKW still in the water nearby.



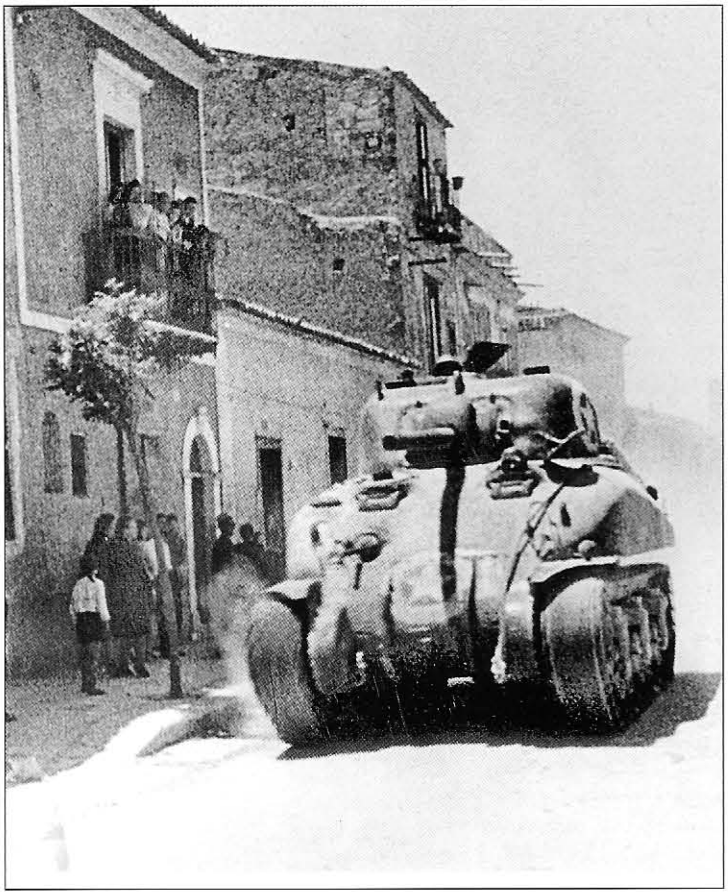
A pair of M2 half-tracks of the 3rd Battalion HQ, 67th Armored Regiment ashore on Sicily. These units were held in reserve and landed several days after the initial infantry landings.



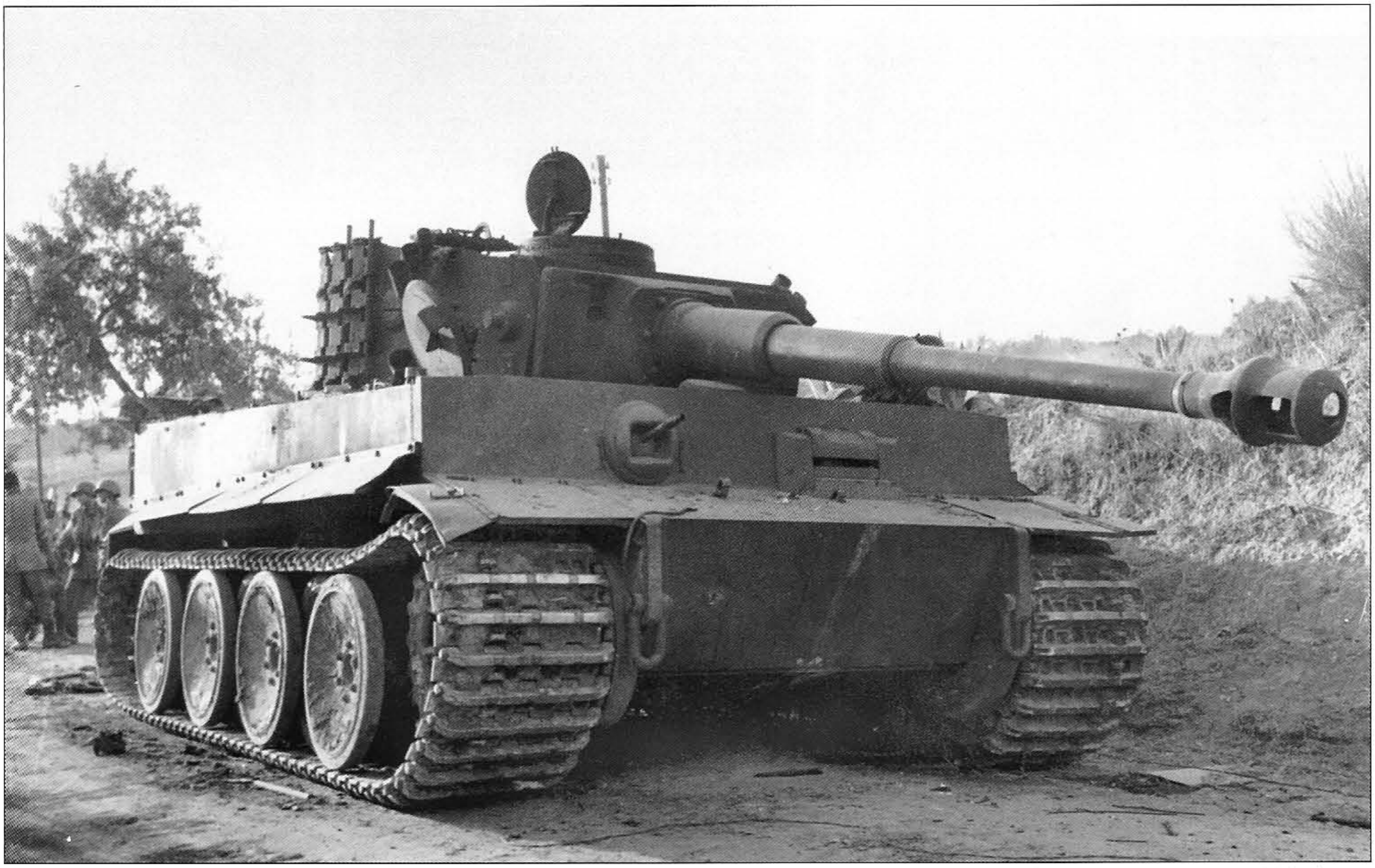
A M4A1 named "Eternity" of Co. E, 2nd Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Division shortly after landing on Sicily. The insignia below the name is the complicated tactical marking system used by the 2nd Armored Division since 1942, with the "T" being the element identifying the 67th Armored Regiment.


L'OBIETTIVO DEL
LA NOSTRA MARCIA
SUL TERRENO
ECONOMICO E LA
REALIZZAZIONE DI
UNA PIU ALTA GIU
STIZIA SOCIALE
SIRACUSA
ENNA

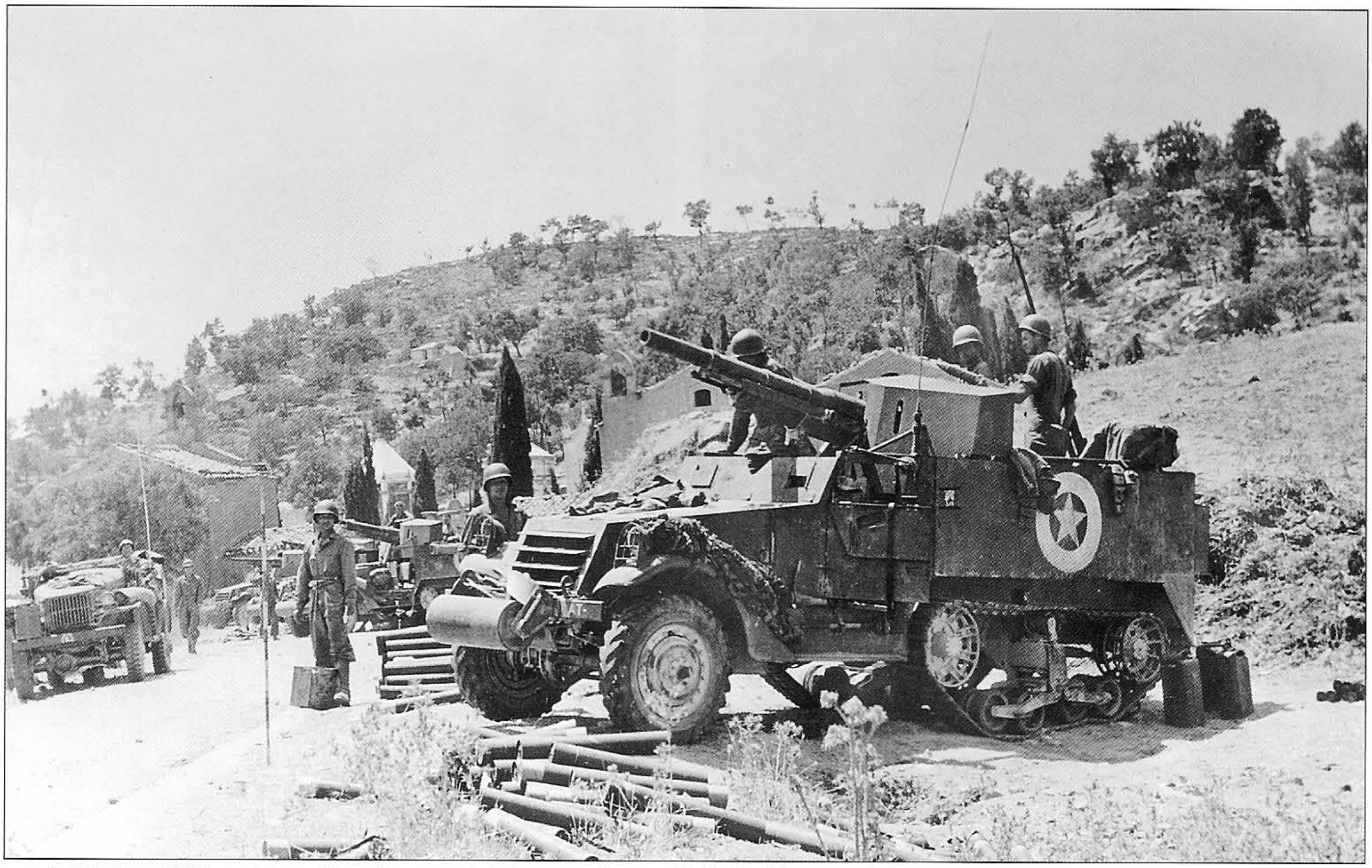
A tanker walks ahead of his M4A1 in Gela on 11 July 1943 shortly after the landings. These tanks were involved in a skirmish with German panzers later in the day.



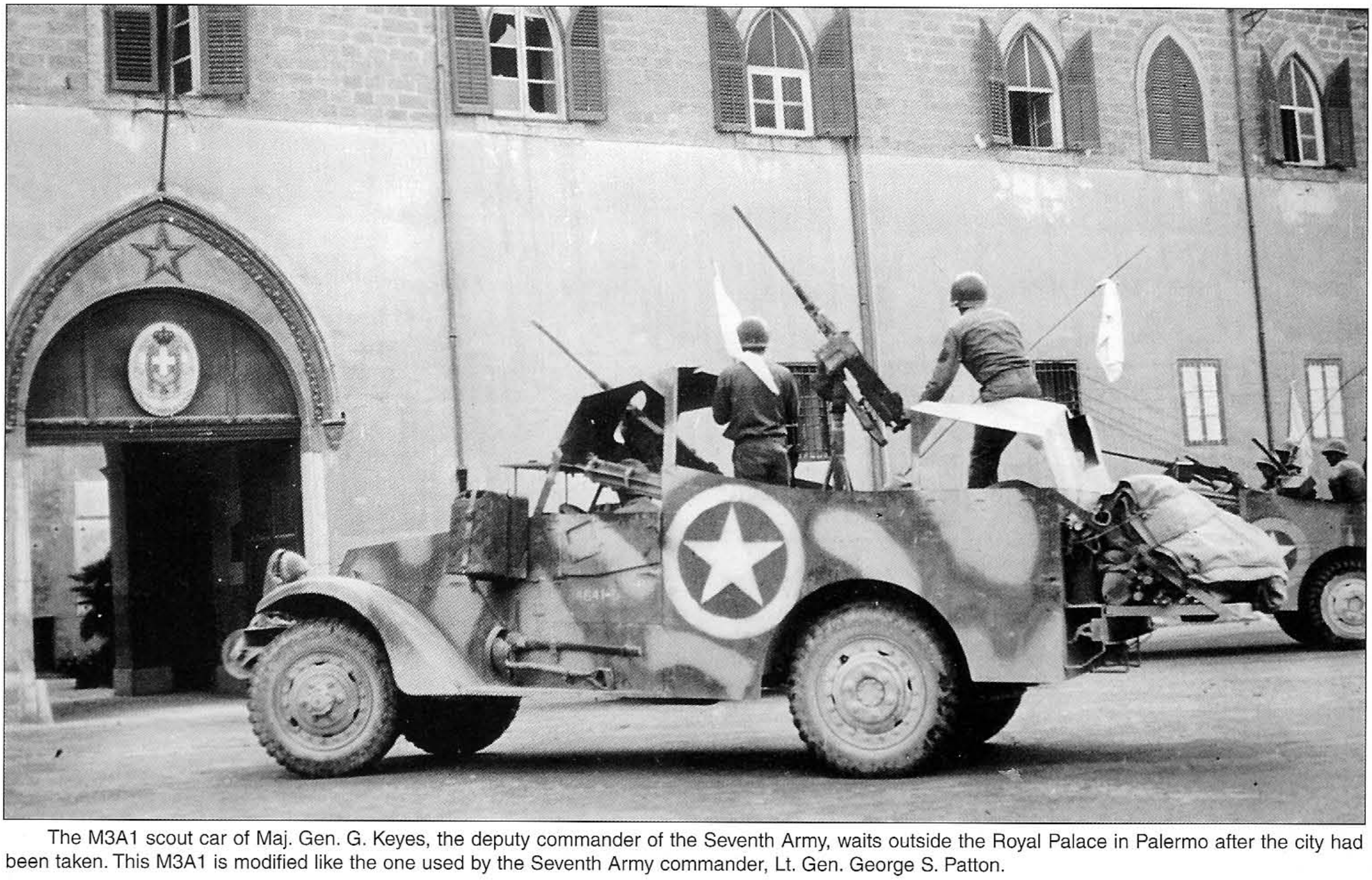
A M4A1 of the 2nd Armored Division barrels through a Sicilian town during the advance towards Palermo.



The beach-head at Gela was attacked by the Hermann Göring Panzer Division, supported by Tiger tanks from 2/sPz.Abt.504. These were hit by heavy naval gunfire and a counter-attack by tanks of the 2nd Armored Division and this one was knocked out during the 11 July fighting.

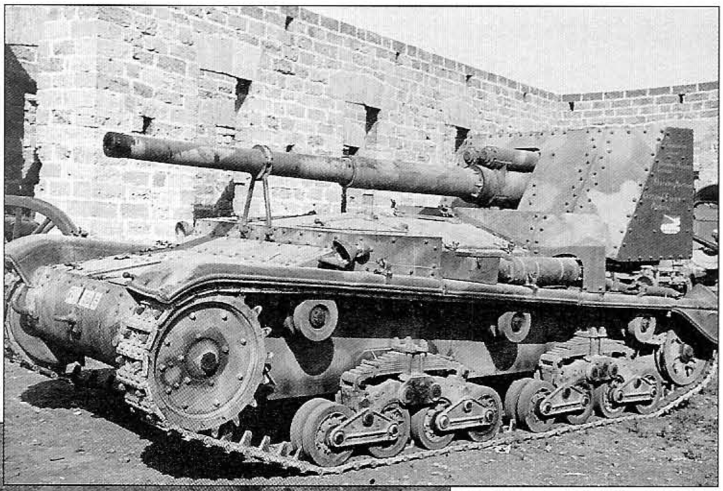


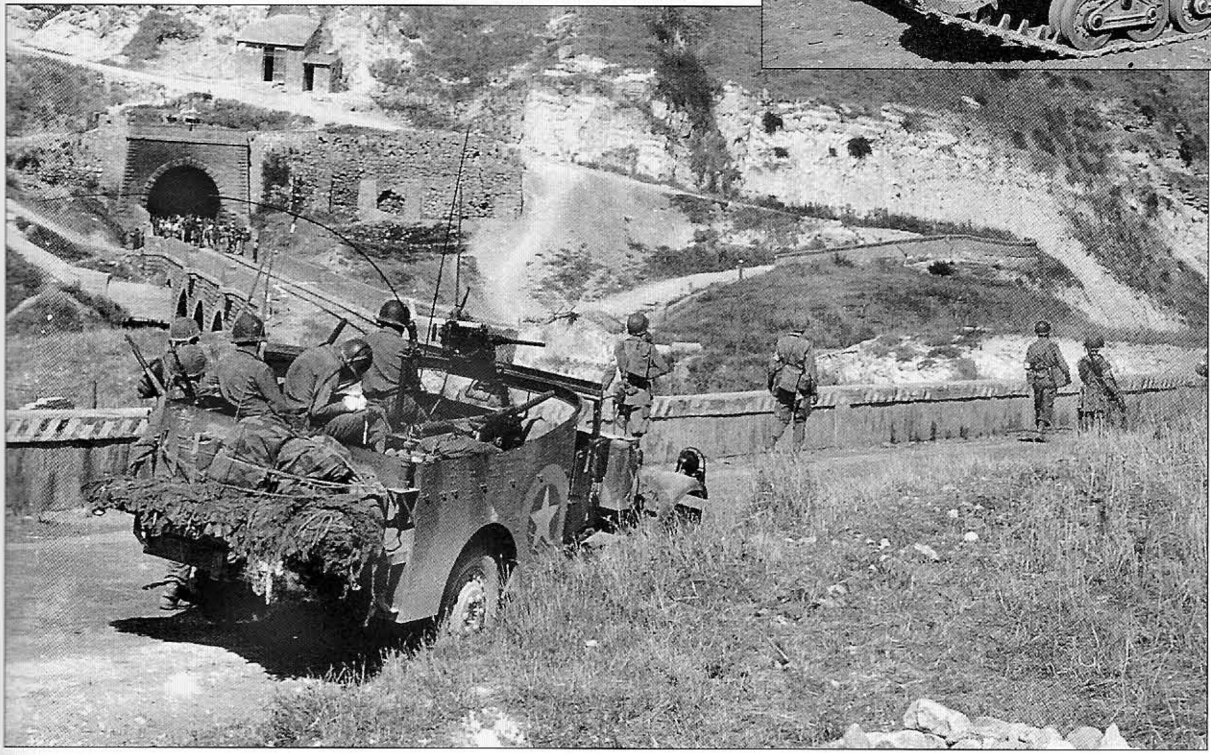
A M3 75mm GMC provides artillery fire support during operations on Sicily. By this stage of the war, the M3 was being replaced in tank destroyer battalions by the M10 3-in. GMC, though none were deployed on Sicily. The bumper markings on this vehicle identify it as belonging to an anti-tank company, some of which used self-propelled 75mm guns instead of towed guns in the summer of 1943 due to changes occurring in tables of organization.



The M3A1 scout car of Maj. Gen. G. Keyes, the deputy commander of the Seventh Army, waits outside the Royal Palace in Palermo after the city had been taken. This M3A1 is modified like the one used by the Seventh Army commander, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton.

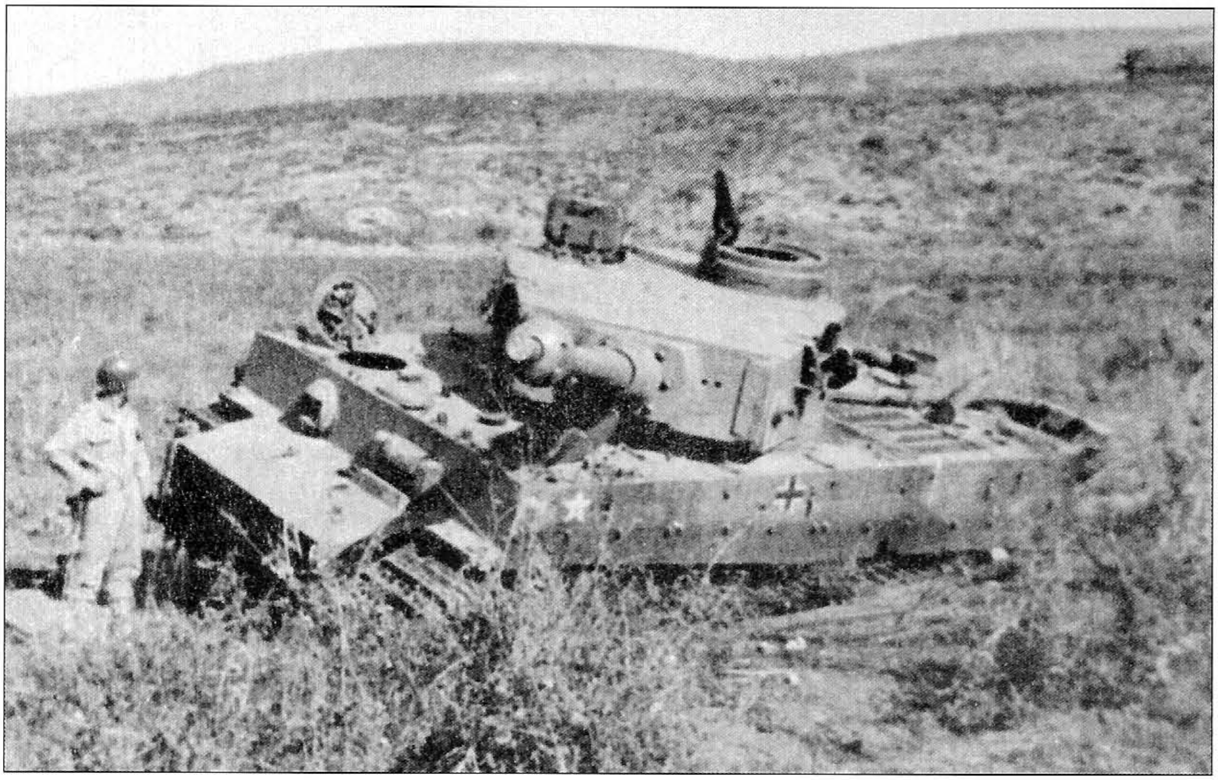
One of the most effective Italian armored units on Sicily was the 10 Raggrupamento Semoventi, equipped with the Semovente 90 da 53. There were 24 of these in three batteries and about five were later captured intact around Campobello-Cancatti. This particular example was later shipped back to the United States and currently resides at the Ordnance Museum at Aberdeen Proving Ground.

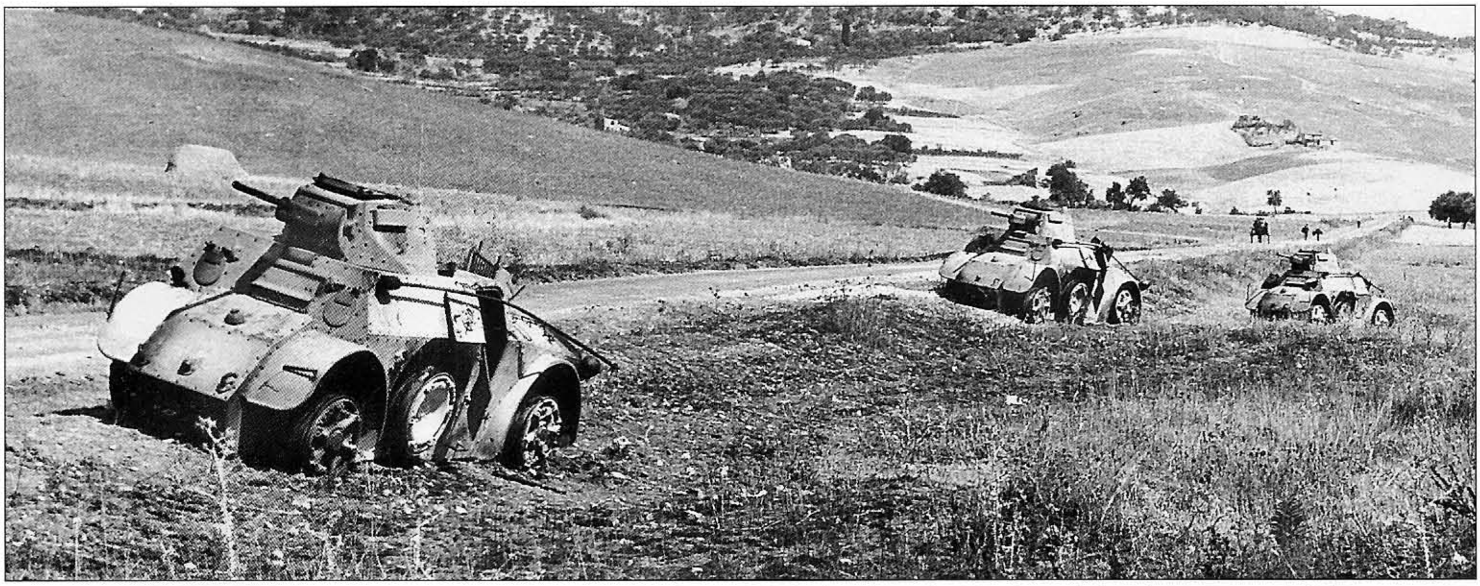




A M3A1 scout car provides support to a column from the 82nd Airborne Division near Sciacca on 20 July 1943.

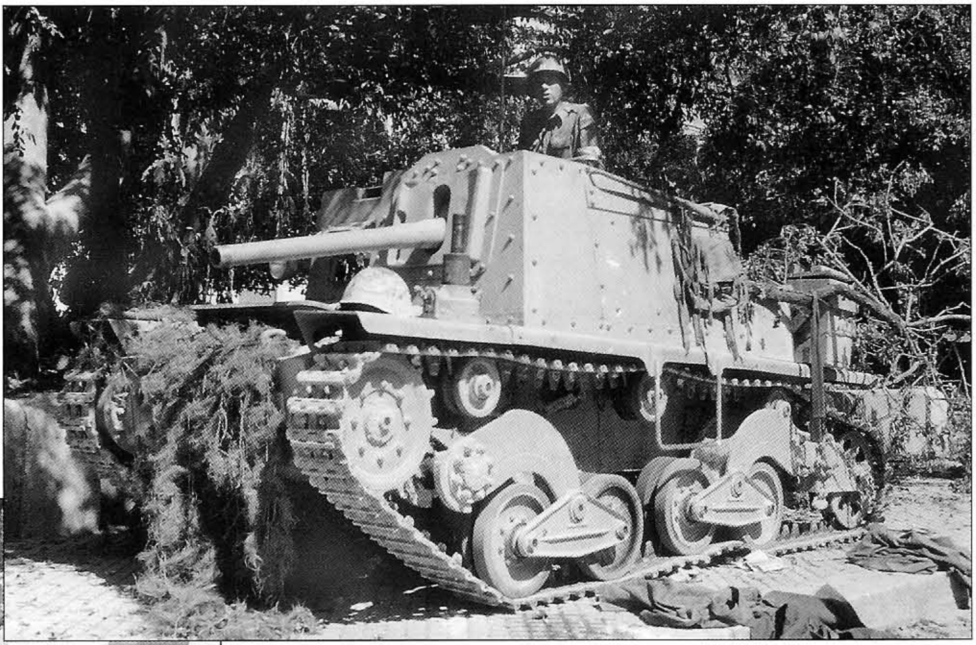
A GI looks over a Tiger I knocked out in Sicily by a hit on the side. The Tigers from the 2/sPz.Abt.504 were attached to Pz.Abt.115 of 15.Pz.Gren.Div. during the later Sicily fighting and carried their marking which consisted of a white star with the letter G superimposed, based on the commander's name (Gericke). This marking was also carried on one of the exhaust shrouds on the rear.

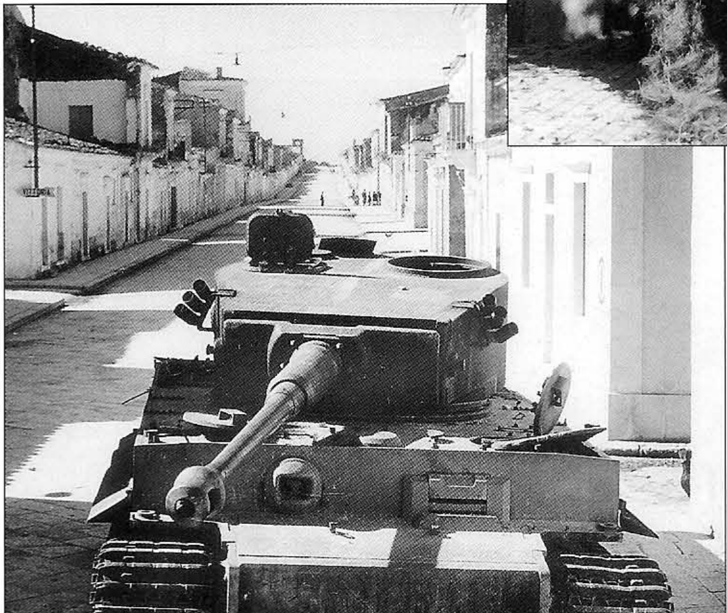




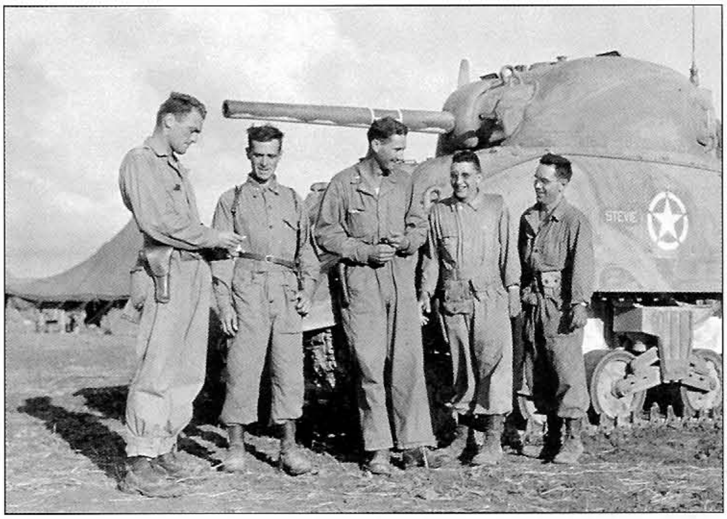
A column of Italian Autoblinda AB.41 armored cars lay abandoned by the roadside in the aftermath of the Seventh Army's attack towards Palermo.

This Semovente 47/32 was captured near Agrigento on 25 July 1943. This small tank destroyer was based on the L6/40 light tank.



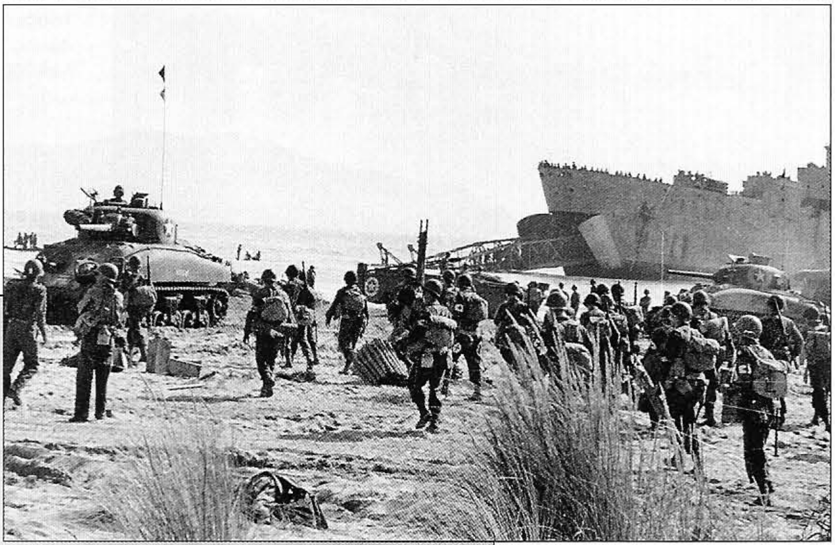


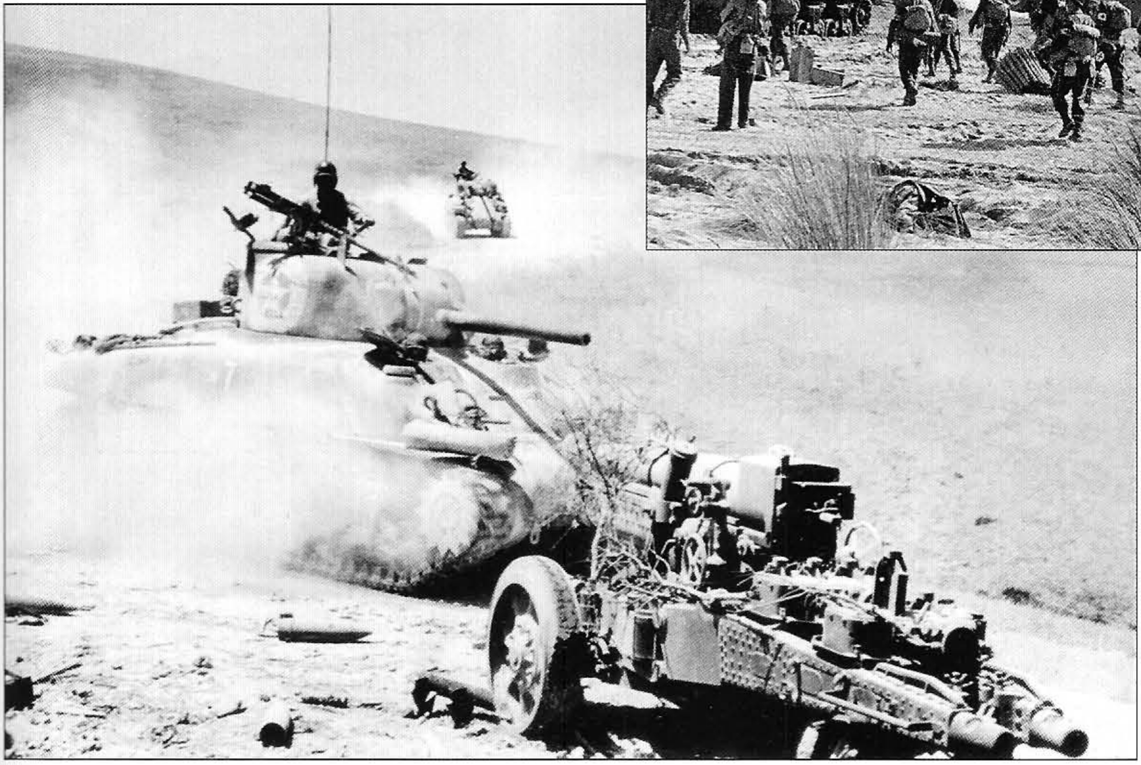
A Tiger I from 2/sPz.Abt.504 abandoned in the streets of Biccari on Sicily towards the end of the campaign.



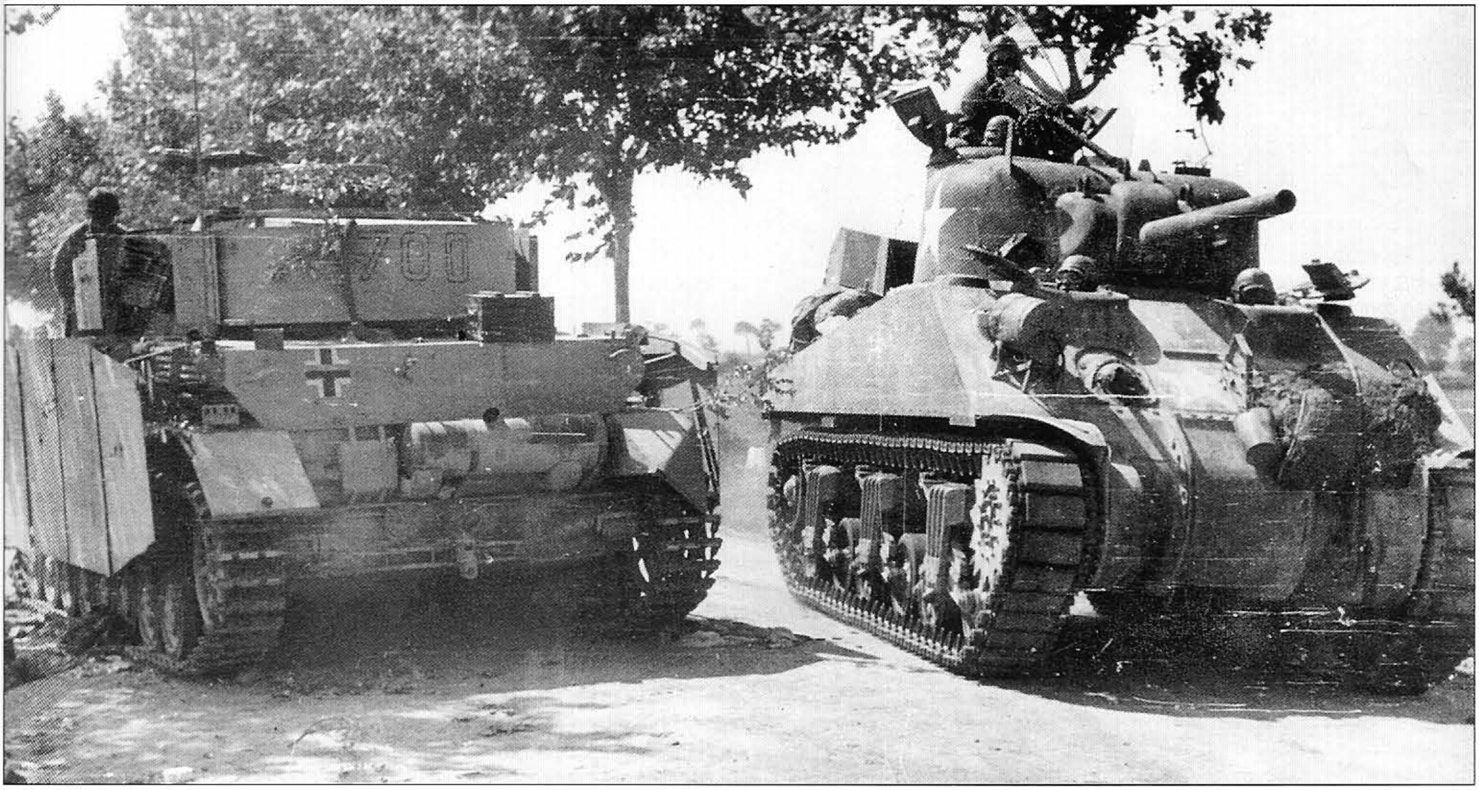
Prior to being sent to Italy, the 1st Armored Division refitted in Algeria in the summer of 1943. These officers were photographed in front of a M4A1 tank named "Steve". This shows the revised style of tactical markings adopted in the summer including the color band on the barrel, as well as the new camouflage finish of black over olive drab with white counter-shading on the lower hull side.

A pair of M4A1 medium tanks come ashore at Salerno on 9 September 1943. They are flying two olive drab pennants from their antenna, a recognition sign adopted for the landing.

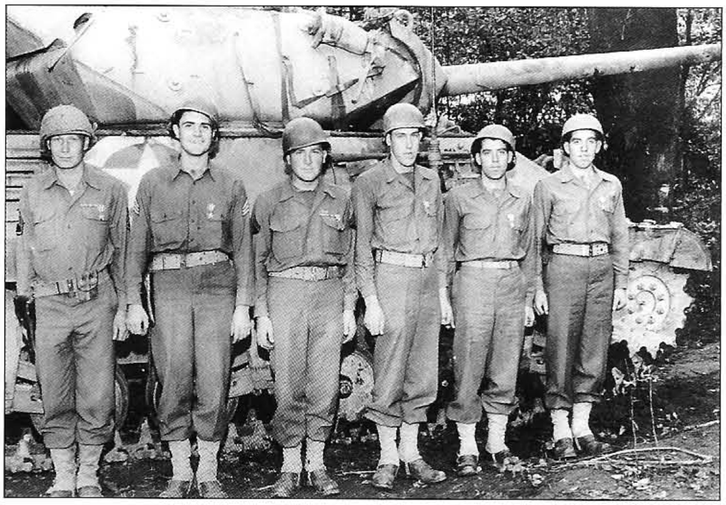




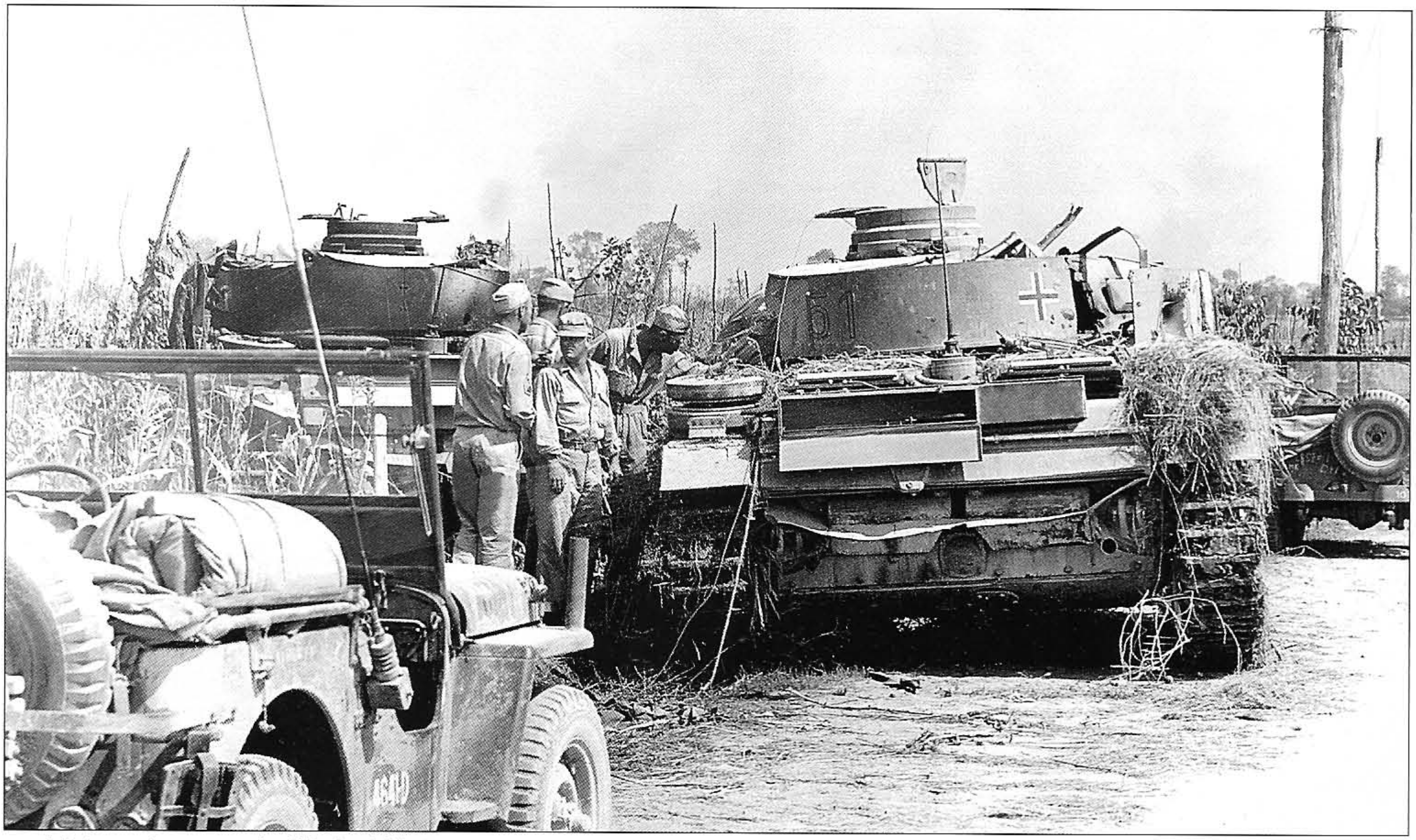
A M4A1 tank passes by an abandoned Italian 149/19 mod.37 howitzer beyond the Salerno beach-head in September 1944.



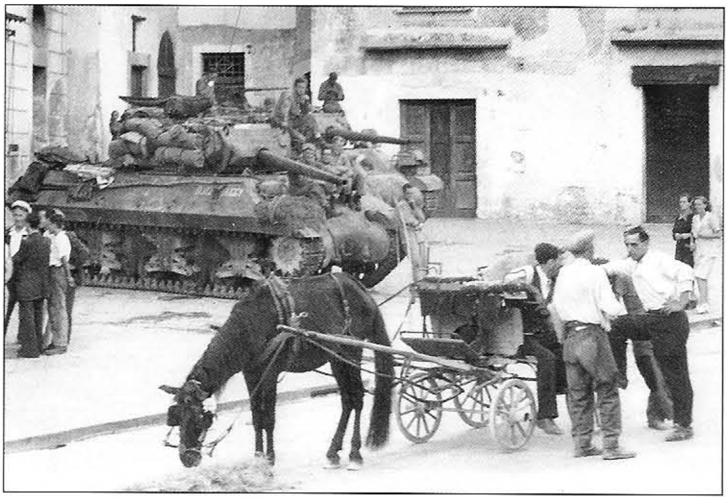
A M4 passes by a Pz.Kpfw.IV knocked out during the fighting along the Salerno beach-head. The German 26.Panzer-Korps including the 16.Pz.Div. and 29.Pz.Gren.Div. launched a major attack against the beach-head on 13 September that caused a crisis in the Allied defense.



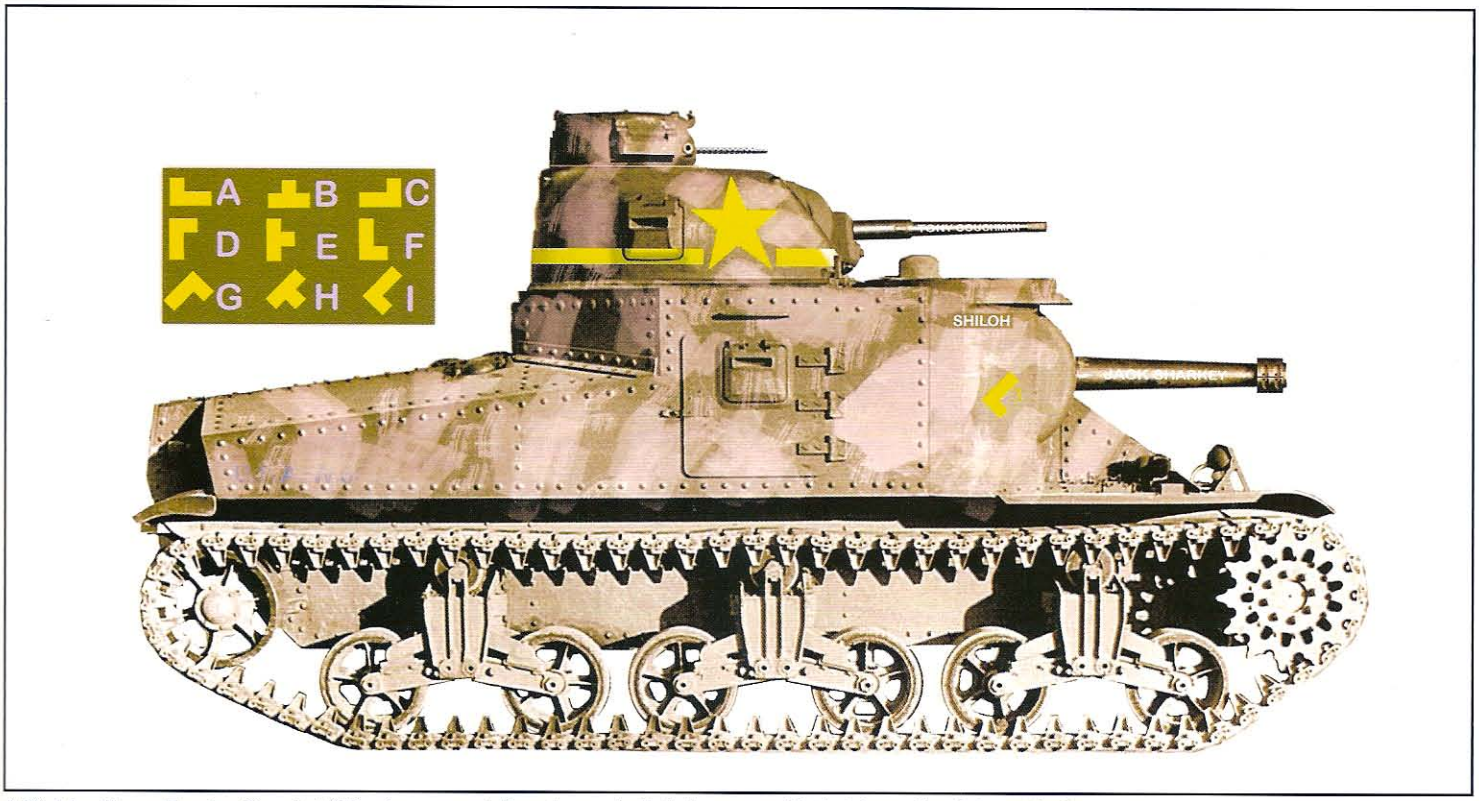
An M10, nicknamed "Jinx", commanded by Sgt. Edwin Yosts of the 636th Tank Destroyer Battalion became the first M10 ace of the war, knocking out five Pz.Kpfw.IV tanks, a half-track, and a pill-box in 25 minutes during the 14 September 1943 German counter-attack. The crew is seen here posed in front of their vehicle after an awards ceremony.



US troops inspect a pair of Pz.Beob.Wg.III Ausf.L command tanks, of the artillery regiment of the 16.Panzer-Division knocked out during the intense fighting around the beach-head on 17 September 1943.

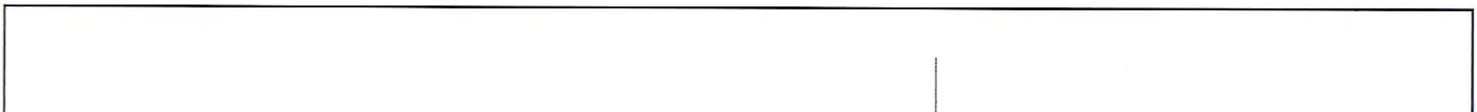


Two M10 units took part in the Salerno landings, the 601st and 645th Tank Destroyer Battalions, and the vehicles seen here are from the latter unit. The M10 in the foreground is named "Blitz Buggy" and follows the usual practice of naming armored vehicle with nicknames starting with the company letter, in this case, Co. B.



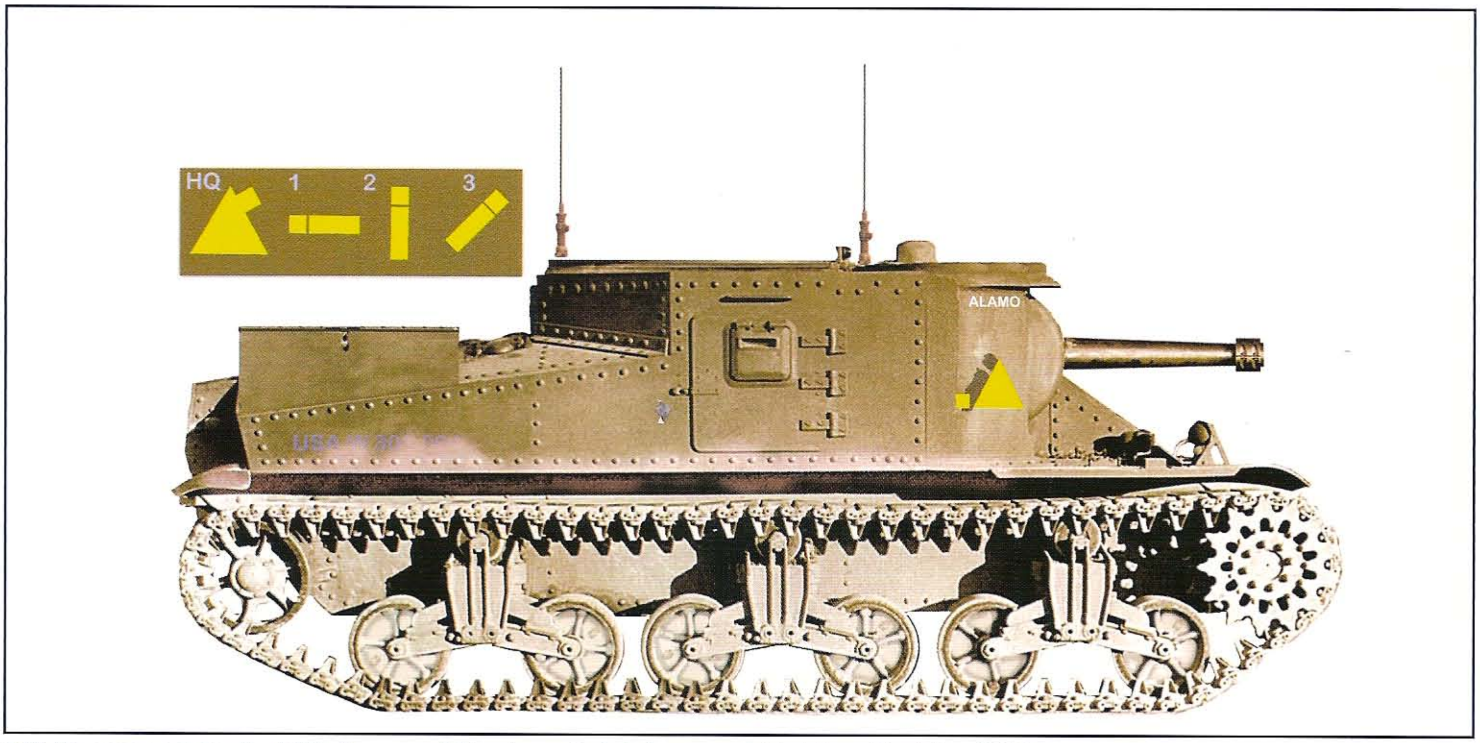
M3 Medium Tank, Co. I, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, Tunisia, 1943

The 1st Armored Division in Tunisia followed the usual Armored Force practice of painting the national insignia and turret band in reduced-visibility yellow. The division used an elaborate system of small geometric symbols to identify the component tank battalions. The symbols consisted of a small bar with either a circle (1st Armored Regiment) or a square (13th Armored Regiment). The battalion was identified by the orientation of the bar (1st horizontal, 2nd vertical, 3rd slanted). The three companies in each battalion were identified by the location of the square or circle on the bar moving from left to right. These are shown in the inset drawing. The individual vehicle number was painted to one side of the symbol. So in this case, the marking identifies "Shiloh" as being the 3rd tank in Co. I. The basic lusterless olive drab paint was poorly suited to desert camouflage, and crews daubed local mud over the vehicle for camouflage.



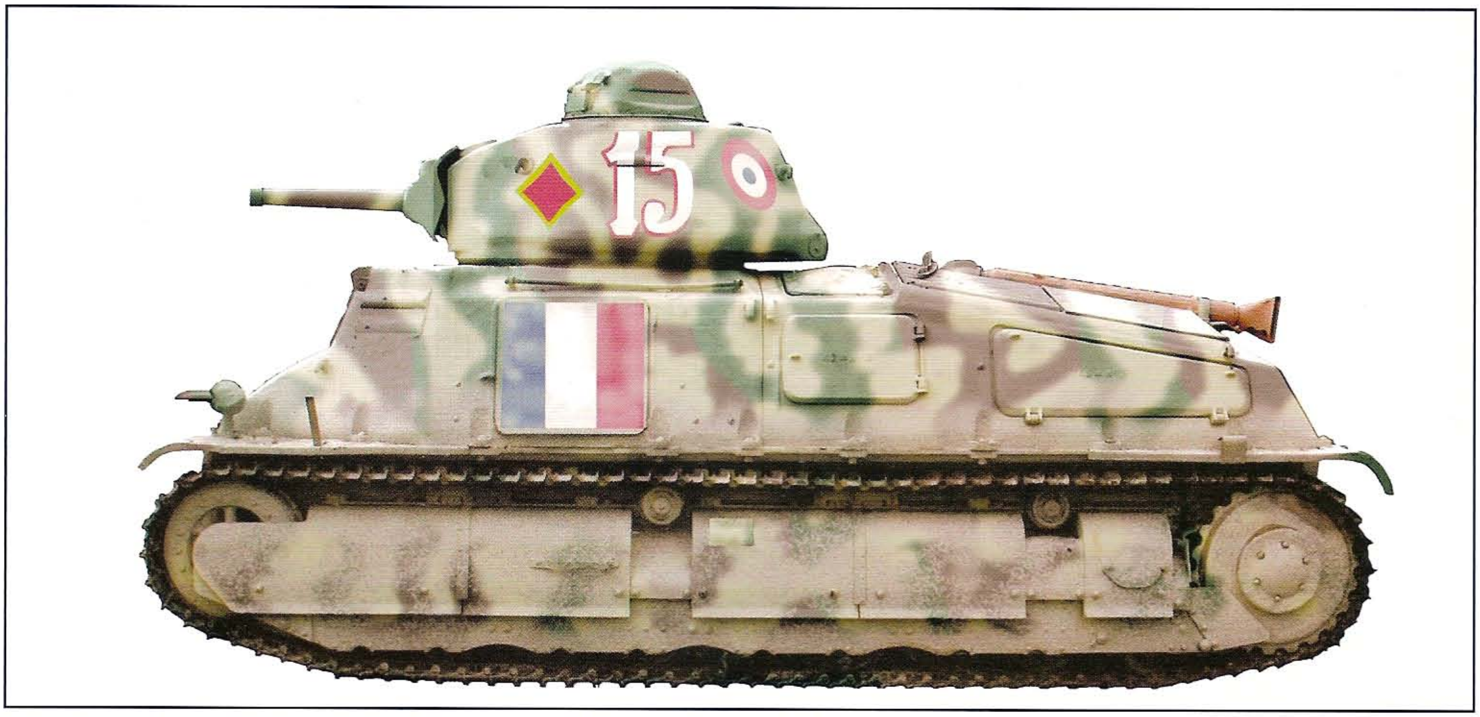
M4A1 Medium Tank, Co. E, 1st Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, Tunisia, 1943

This plate shows the corresponding insignia for the tank companies of the 1st Armored Regiment. The markings practice in this unit was somewhat different than in the 13th Armored Regiment, as the unit insignia was often painted within the turret band as seen here rather than separately on the hull. During the initial fighting in Tunisia, it was found that the markings were too small to aid in identification, and crews began to paint the tank number in very large fashion on the hull side, and often on the rear engine plate as well either in white or yellow. This plate also shows the use of local mud camouflage over the basic olive drab finish.



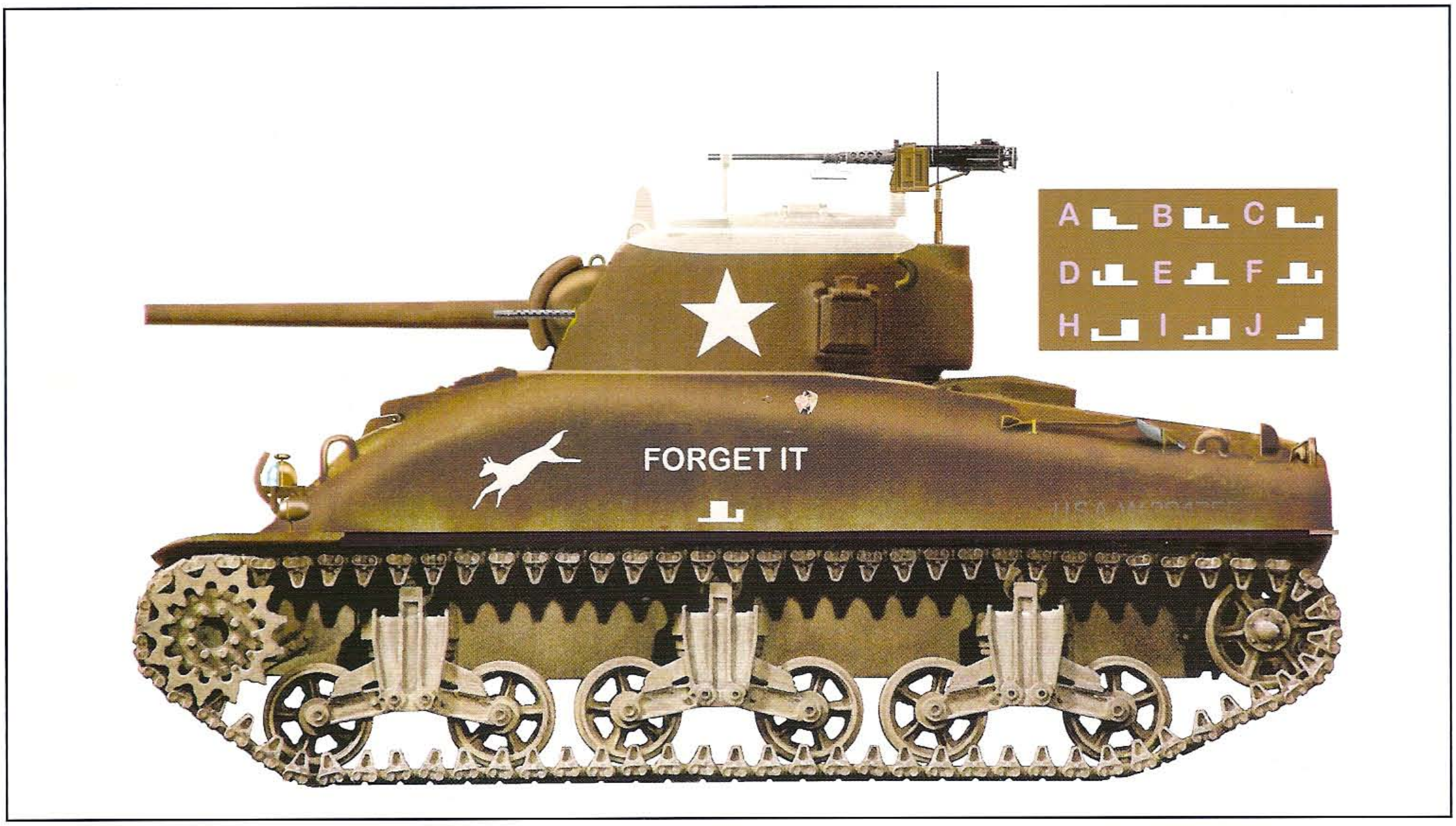
M3 Command Tank, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, Tunisia, 1943

During the final stages of the Tunisian campaign, the headquarters of the 13th Armored Regiment used this modified M3 medium tank as its command tank. "Alamo" was formerly used by the commander of the 3rd Tank Battalion of the regiment, but when they were re-equipped with M4A1 tanks after the Kasserine pass fighting, this vehicle became surplus. The turret was removed and covered over. The headquarters had slightly different markings from the line companies. The two regimental headquarters used a triangle with either a circle (1st Armored Regiment) or a square (13th Armored Regiment). The battalion headquarters used a bar like their line companies, but the circle or square was placed at the end of the bar as shown in the inset drawing. The official style of the regimental insignia is shown on the inset drawing, but in practice as seen here, the square was often painted elsewhere. As can be seen here, the original 3rd Battalion insignia has been over-painted, and the new regimental HQ insignia painted near this.



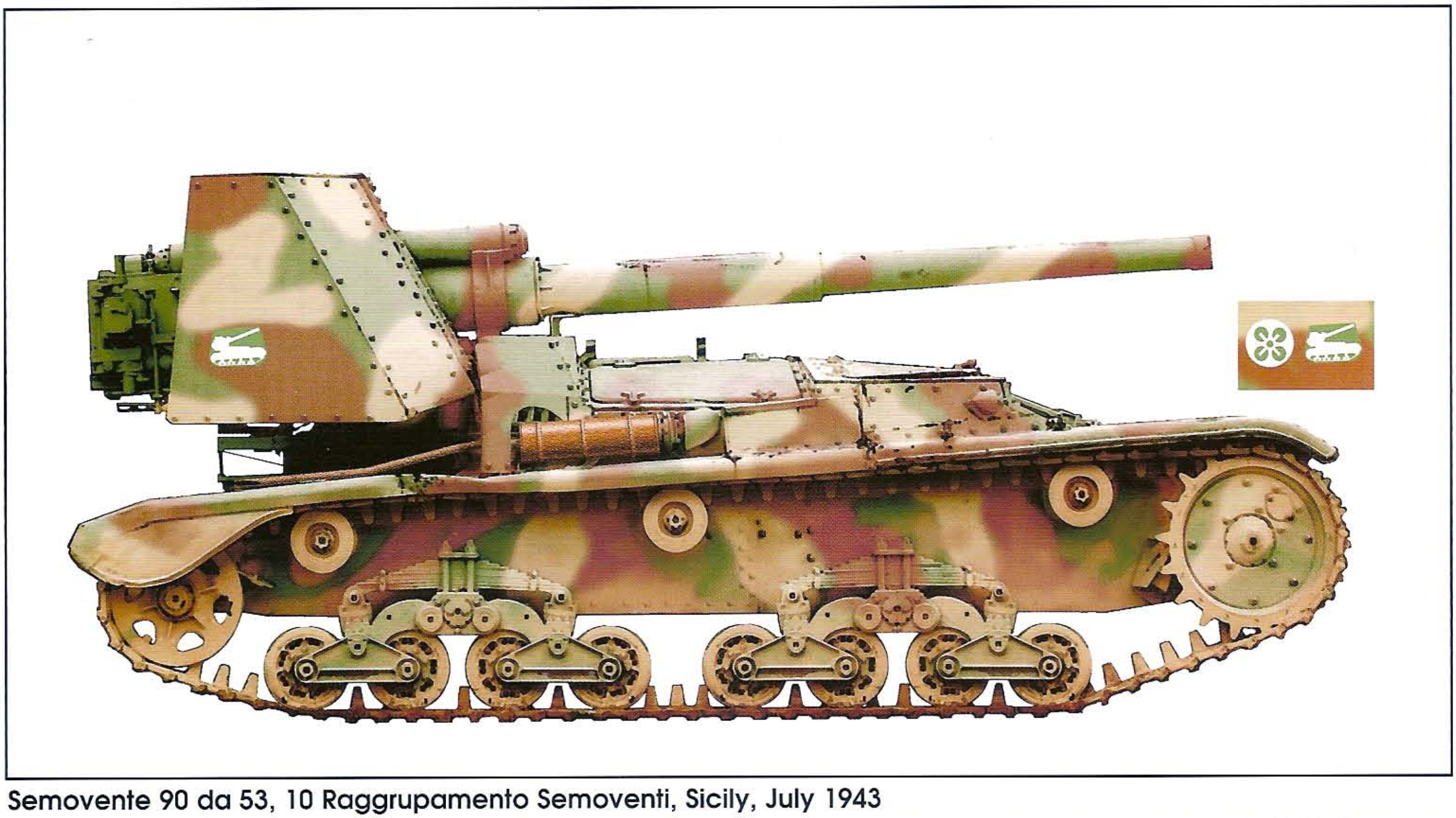
Somua S-35, 12e Regiment des Chasseurs d'Afrique, Tunisia, 1943

The 12e Chasseurs d'Afrique were equipped with 23 Somua cavalry tanks when North Africa was invaded by the US Army. After the French forces sided with the Allies, this unit took part in various actions with French forces, finally taking part in the Tunisian campaign with the GBF (Groupement Blindee Francais - French Armored Group). The Somuas were originally finished in the spring 1940 pattern of army dark green with vertical bands of dark earth brown. This was not very appropriate for Tunisia, and they received a sprayed pattern of sand color over this. The markings were fairly elaborate including the usual French playing card tactical symbols, but with larger than normal French national identification including both the usual roundel, as well as a very prominent flag. The turret tactical numbers were also larger than usual. Although not clear here, there was a white allied star on top of the commander's cupola on the turret. This unit converted to M4A2 Shermans later in the summer and in 1944 took part in the campaign in France with the French 2nd Armored Division with the Somua plaques taken off these old tanks and fastened to the Shermans.



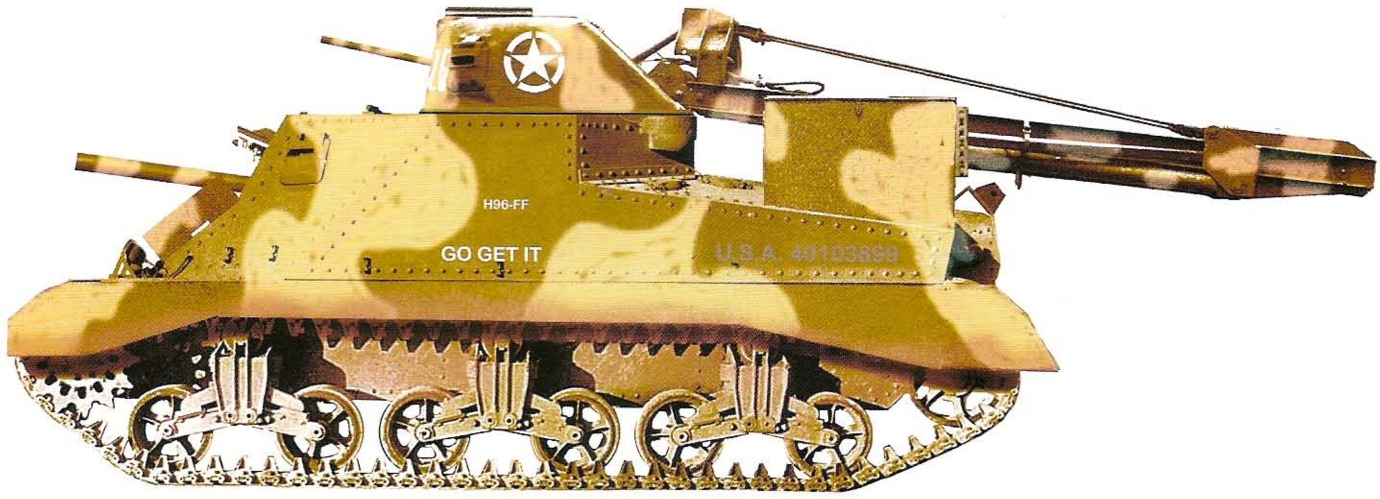
M4A1 Medium Tank, Co. F, 66th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Division, Oran, 1943

The 2nd Armored Division had its own set of tactical markings similar to those of the 1st Armored Division. The tank companies of the 66th Armored Regiment used a square on a horizontal bar, while the 67th Armored Regiment used a "T" on the bar. The 1st Battalion had the square or T on the left, the 2nd Battalion in the center, and the 3rd on the right. Likewise, each company "pip" insignia progressed from left to right. The inset drawing shows the 66th Armored Regiment insignia. "Fox" Company of the 66th Armored Regiment also painted a leaping fox on their tanks in North Africa as seen here. The 2nd Armored Division painted the turrets of their tanks white for air identification since 1942, though this practice was abandoned by the time of Operation Husky.



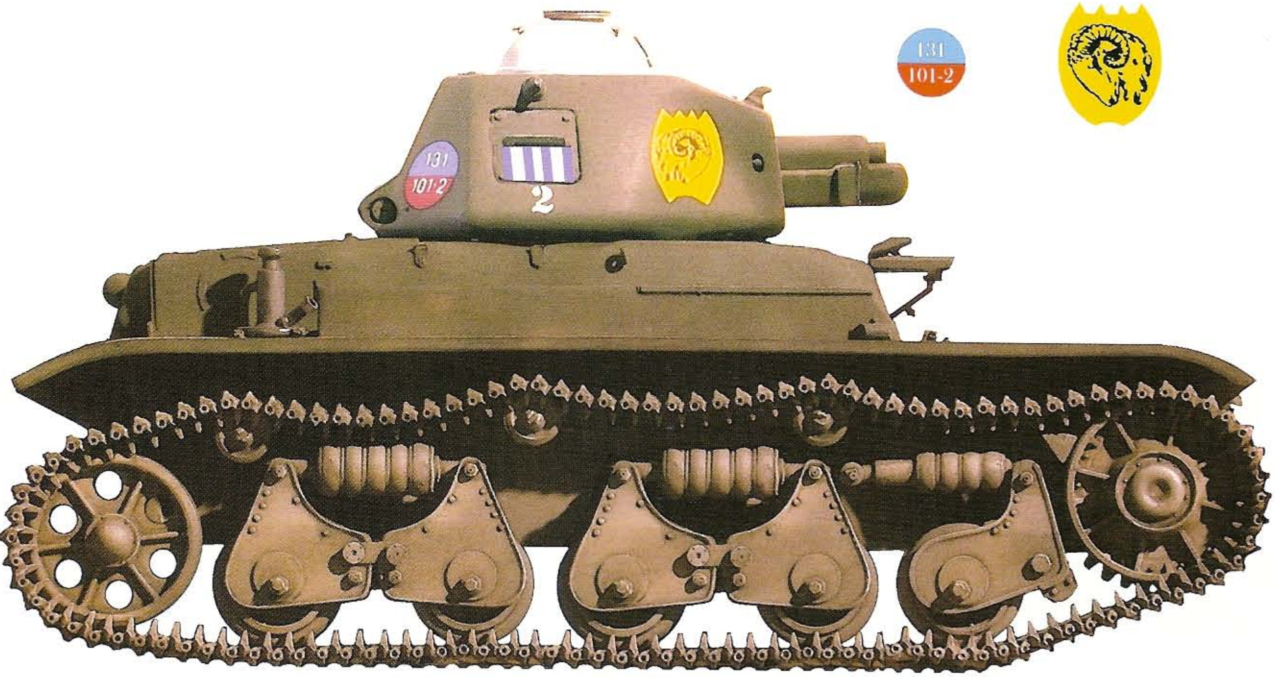
Semovente 90 da 53, 10 Raggrupamento Semoventi, Sicily, July 1943

One of the most effective Italian armored units on Sicily was the 10th Assault Gun Group equipped with the Semovente 90/53. These were originally finished in the usual Italian army gray-green, but the vehicles were later camouflage painted in a pattern of earth brown and sand over the green. Photos of the vehicles show two different types of unit insignia, one a stylized profile of the vehicle in white, and the other a green ivy leaf in a circle which are seen in the inset drawing.



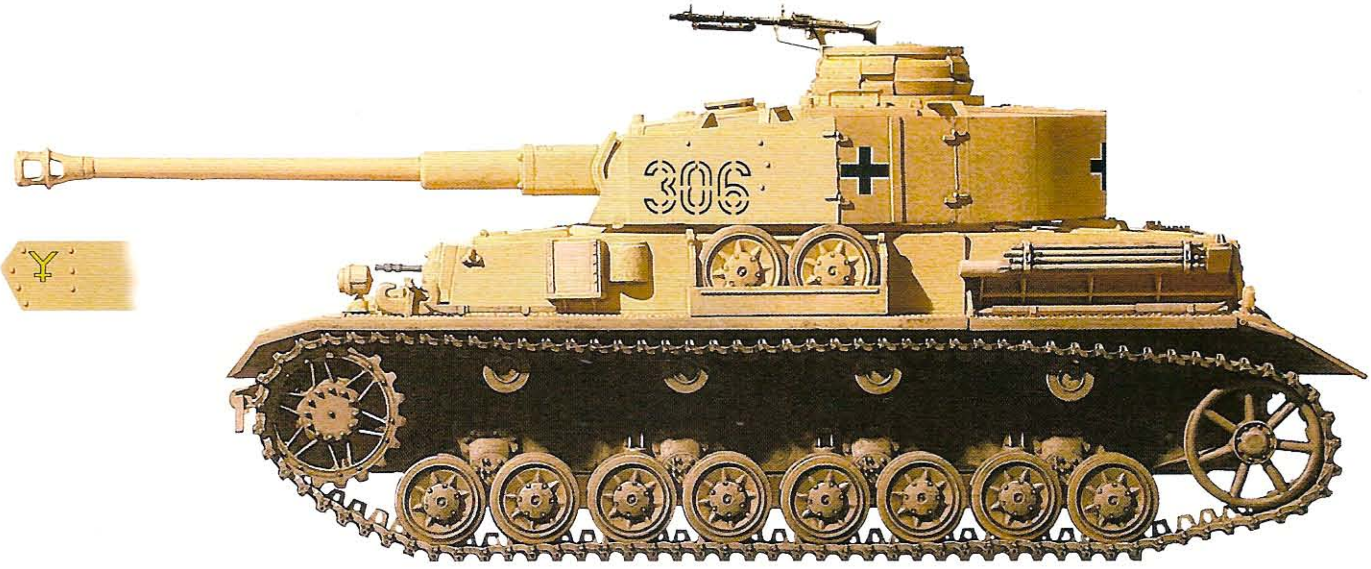
T2 Tank Recovery Vehicle, 2nd Armored Division, Sicily, July 1943

Prior to the Sicily invasion, Operational Memo 34 was issued which instructed armored units to camouflage their tanks and other vehicles with a pattern of earth yellow or earth red over the usual olive drab. The 2nd Armored Division generally used earth yellow as seen here. Sicily saw the introduction of the "Allied Star", designed after it was found that the US star insignia could be mistaken for a German cross at a distance. This was supposed to be carried in 20 inch size on the turret side, turret roof, and front transmission housing, and a larger 60 inch star was carried on the engine deck.



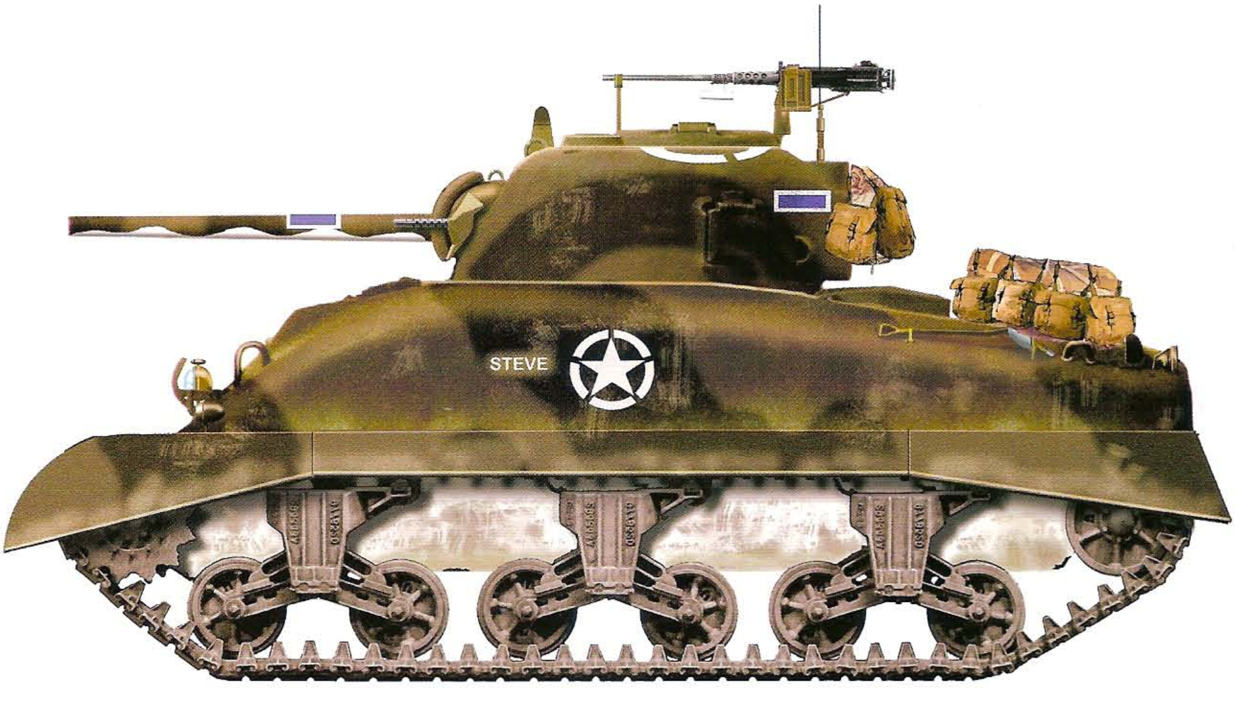
R-35, 101st Battalion, 131st Tank Regiment, Gela, Sicily, July 1943

Italian Renaults were finished in standard Italian gray-green (grigio-verde). For air identification, Italian tanks carried a white circle on the roof as a means of air identification and on the Renault, the round turret dome was painted in white for this reason. The 131st Tank Regiment used a bisected circle of red and blue with the regiment number on the top in white, and the battalion number, followed by company on the bottom. This was carried on both sides of the turret rear, and on some tanks was repeated on the front of the turret as well. This tank also carried the usual battalion markings in the form of a colored rectangle, the pale blue indicating 2nd Company, the three white lines indicating the 3rd Platoon, and the number below indicating the individual vehicle. This was carried on either side of the turret, and on the rear. Finally, all three companies of the 101st Tank Battalion had their own insignia. The 1st Company used a rearing stallion in black on a white rectangle, the 2nd Company used a ram's head on a yellow shield, while the 3rd Company's insignia is not known.



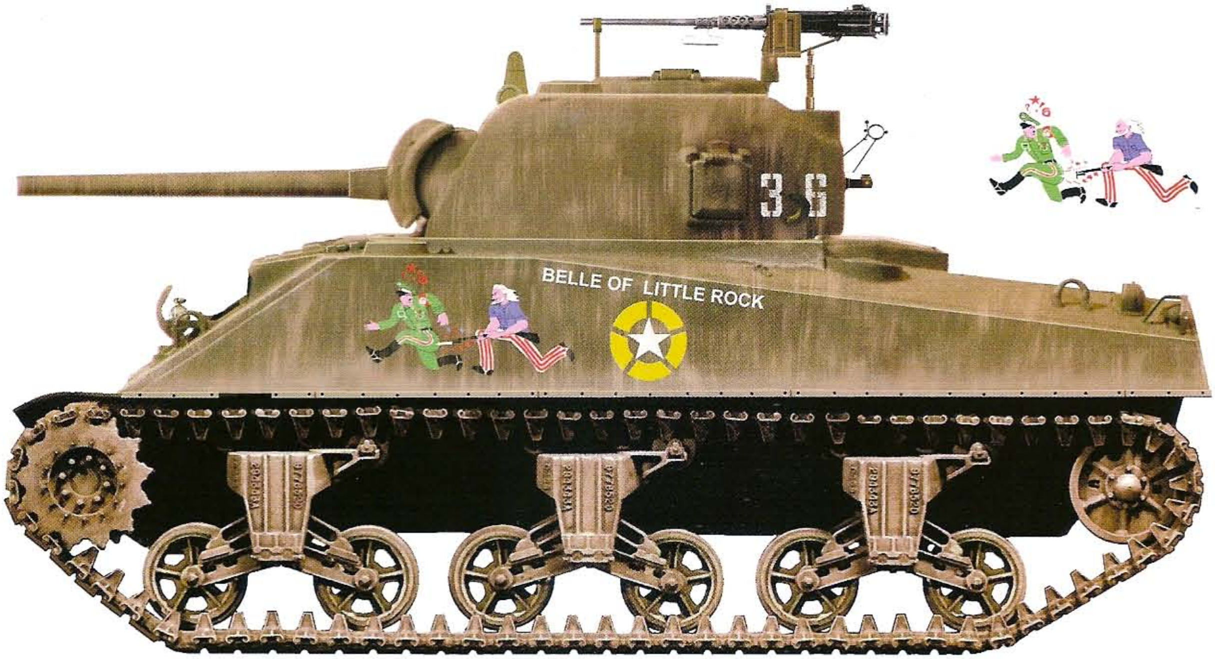
Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H, 16.Panzer-Division, Salerno, September 1943

The color and markings of the 16.Panzer-Division at Salerno were relatively plain at the time of the autumn fighting. The Pz.Kpfw.IV was painted in overall RAL 7028 dark yellow with no additional camouflage colors. The tactical numbers were painted on in black. The divisional insignia was painted on either in black outline, or sometimes with the inside filled in yellow as seen here. This insignia was carried on the rear left plate as seen in the inset, and on the front as well.



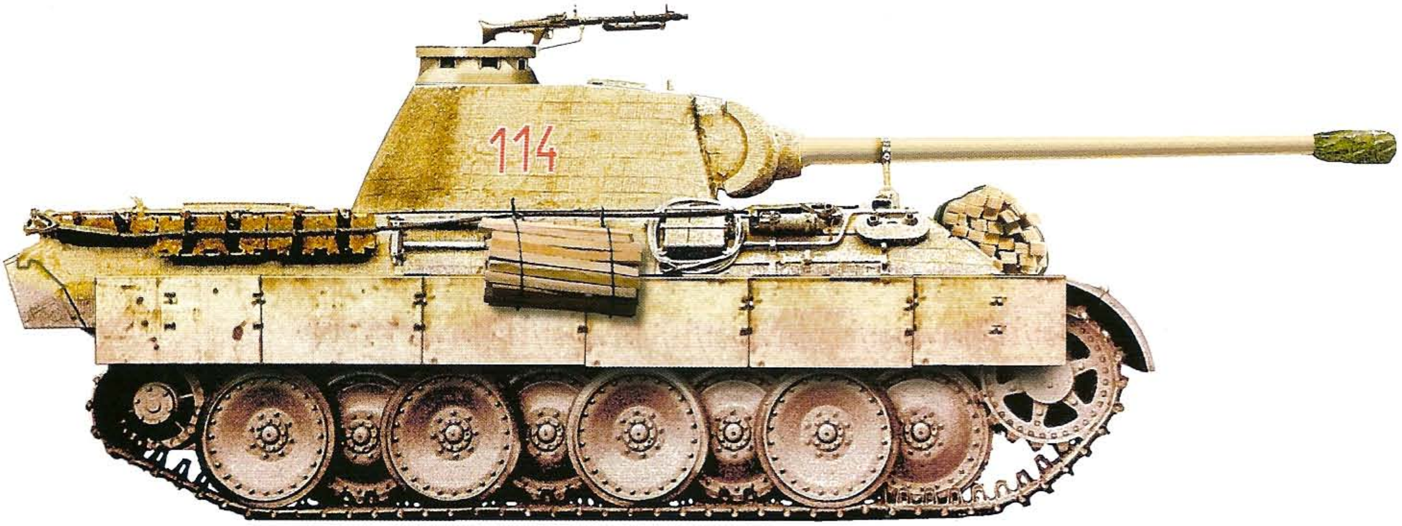
M4A1 Medium Tank, Co. F, 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, Italy, 1944

While refitting in Algeria in the summer of 1943, the 1st Armored Division switched its markings and camouflage. The division tanks were mostly camouflaged in black or earth red over olive drab, with the black/OD scheme predominating as seen in the example here. Curiously enough, some of the tanks received white counter-shading under barrel, transmission housing, and on the lower hull sides. This was a concept promulgated in the FM-5-20B field manual, but rarely used. A new set of simpler unit insignia was adopted. Vertical stripes were painted on the barrel to identify the platoon: one, two, or three stripes for 1st, 2nd, or 3rd platoon. The color of the stripes identified the company: red for the lead company (A in1st Bn., D in 2nd Bn., G in 3rd Bn.); white for the next company (B, E, H), and blue for the last company (C, F, I). These stripes were repeated as vertical bars on the rear turret sides, often with white edging for better visibility. This is the command tank of Capt. John C. Elliott, Co. F. commander of the 2nd Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment. The command tanks used horizontal bars instead of vertical bars as seen here. HQ tanks did not always follow the practice of using the company letter to begin the name, so this one was called "Steve".



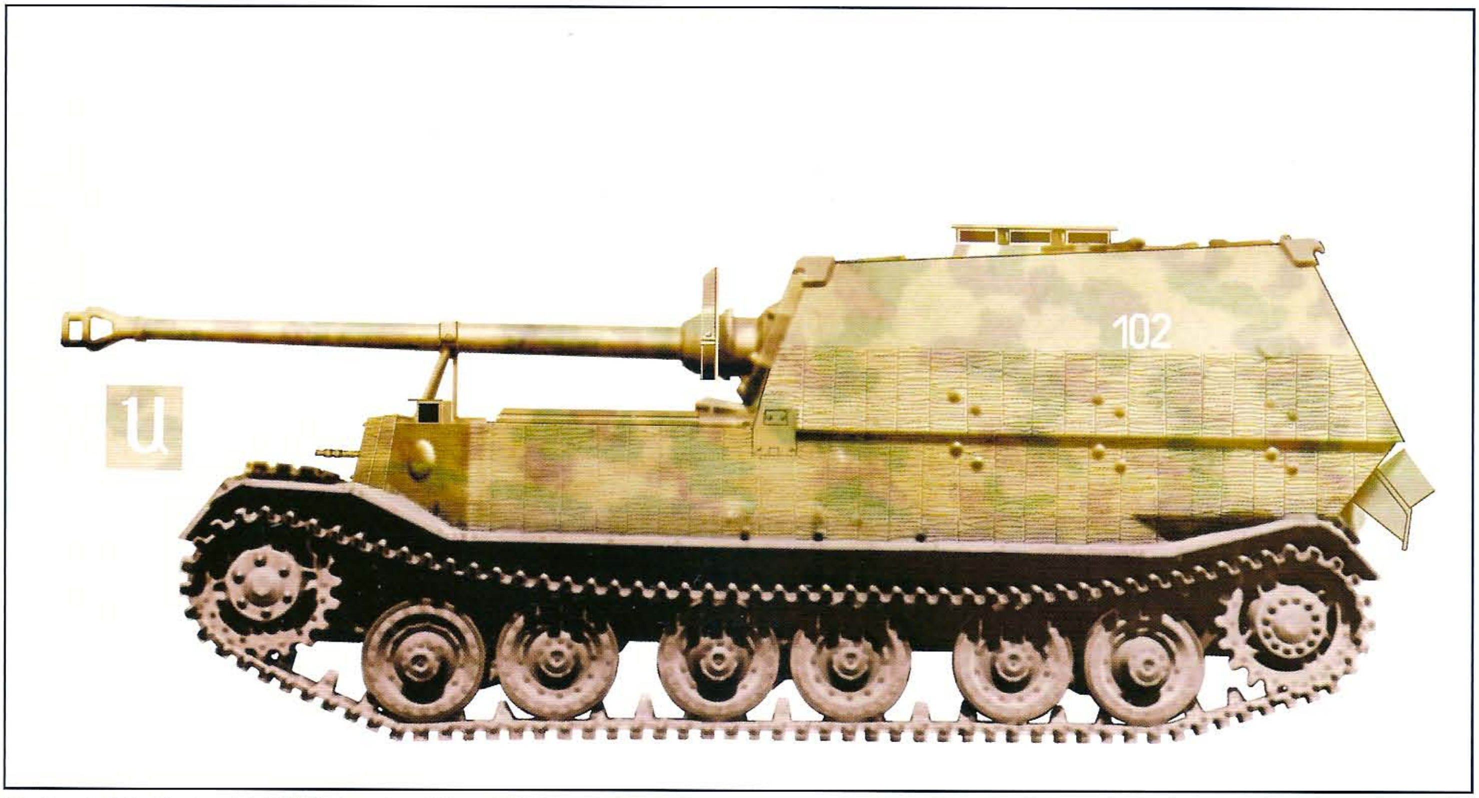
M4 Medium Tank, 755th Tank Battalion, Italy, 1944

The practice of painting cartoons on US tanks was not as common as in the air force, but was occasionally seen. This M4 of Lt. R. Hoffman of Company B, 755th Tank Battalion had an elaborate cartoon painted on the side depicting Uncle Sam chasing Hitler. The tank also carries a "Salerno star". In September 1943, the Allied Forces HQ ordered tank units participating in Salerno amphibious landings to add an enlarged white or yellow circle around the white star. The tank also carries the usual style of tactical speed number in white on the rear of the turret.



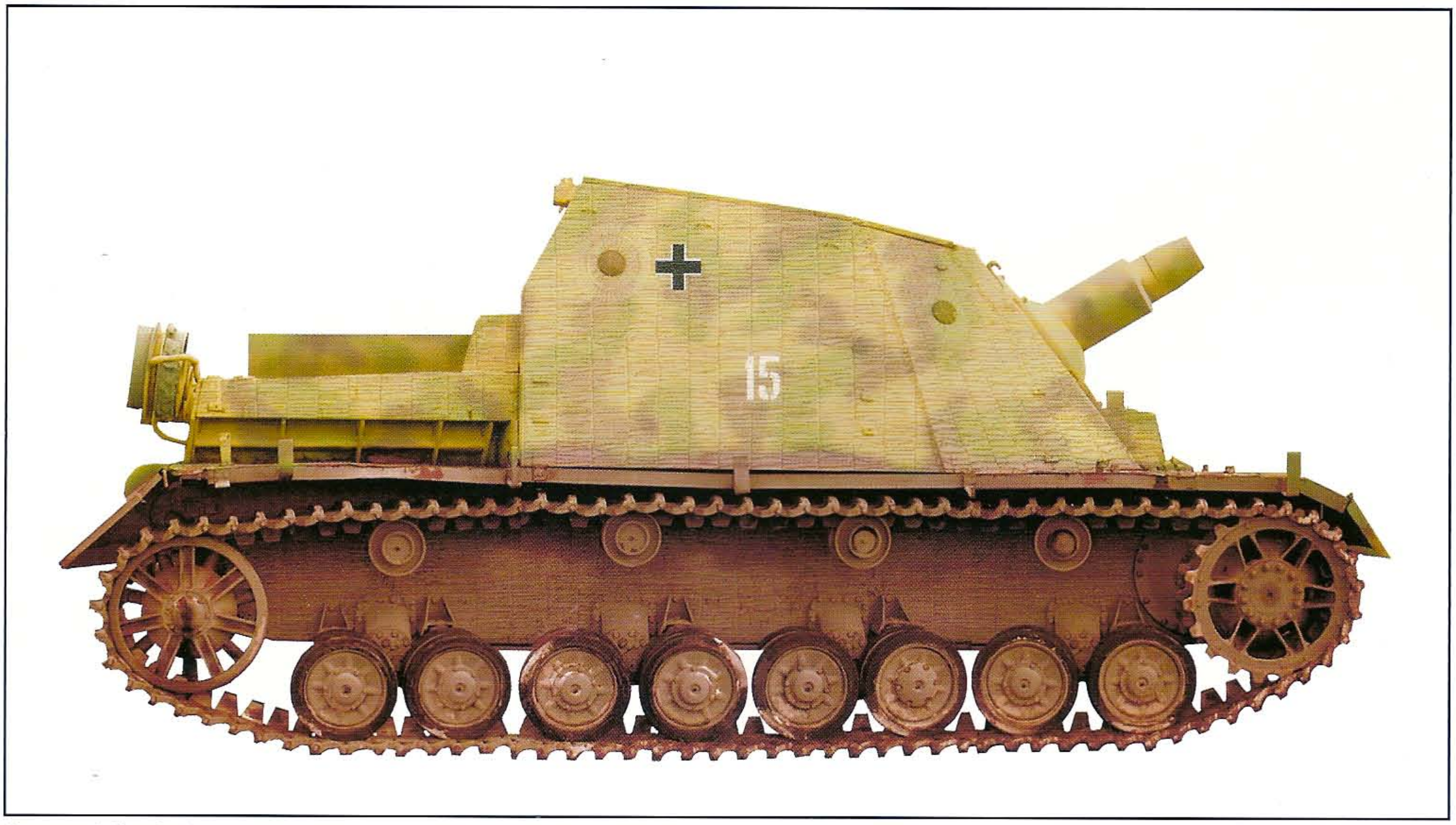
Panther Ausf.A, 1/Pz.Rgt.4, Anzio, May 1944

The Panther tanks of Pz.Rgt.4 committed to the Anzio fighting became quite beat up in the four months of fighting in the mud. This particular Panther, an early production Ausf.A, was finished in plain, overall RAL 7028 dark yellow. The usual style of three digit tactical number was painted on the turret side. As can be seen here, the Panthers usually carried improvised corduroy mats made from lengths of wood lashed together with wire or rope to help them traverse muddy areas.



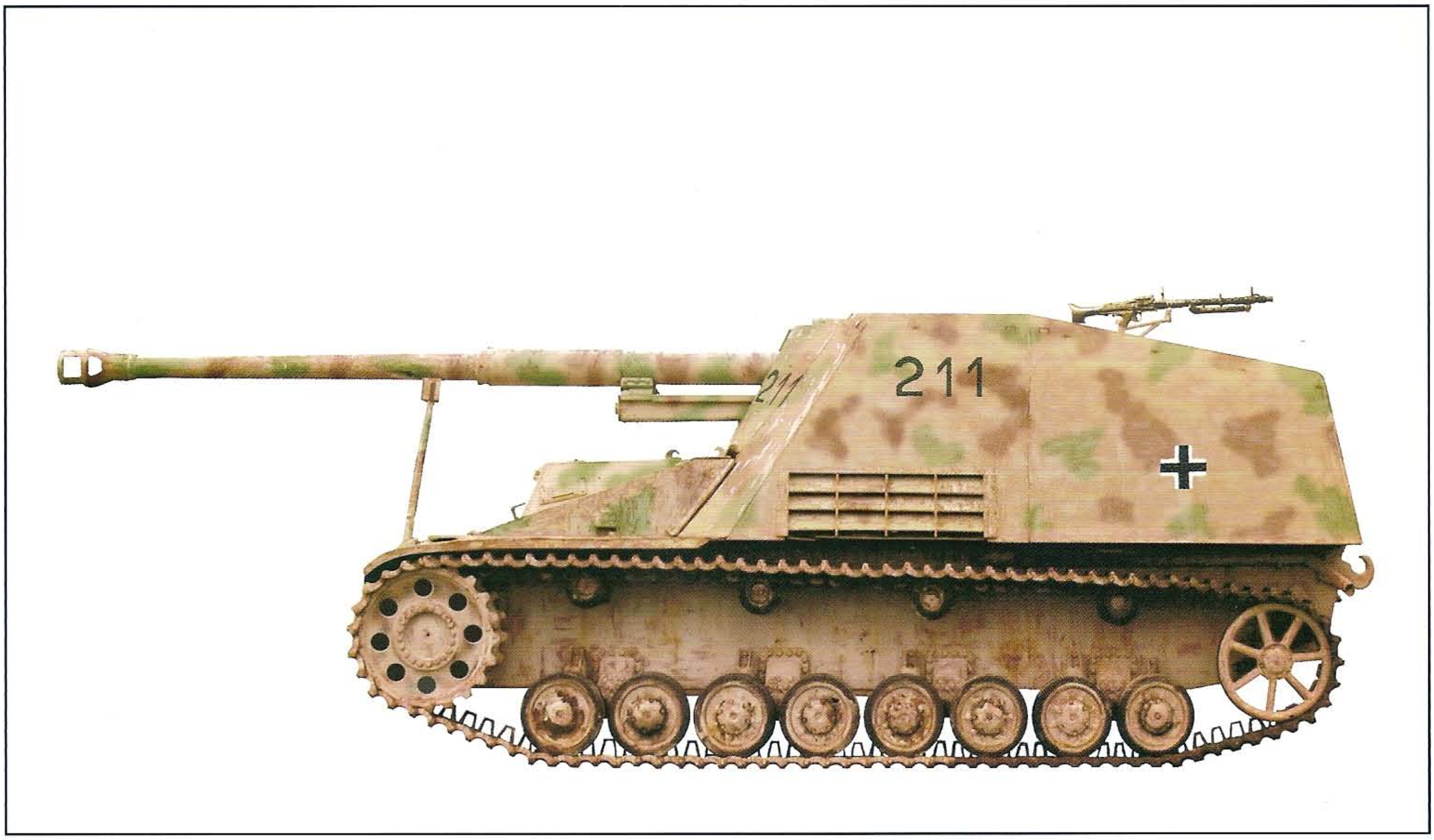
Elefant, 1/s.Pz.Jg.Abt.653, Anzio, May 1944

The Elefants serving in Italy were painted in the usual Wehrmacht 1943 scheme of RAL 7028 dark yellow with patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown. The green and brown paint was supplied to the units in the form of a pigmented paste which could be thinned with fuel or other solvents before spraying with an air brush. This improvised approach often resulted in the crews thinning the pigment too much and as a result, the patterns were not very opaque and at times were almost transparent. Besides the usual white three digit number, the Elefant company in Italy often painted a small white "U" on the rear and front of the vehicle, in honor of the commander, Hauptmann Ulbricht.



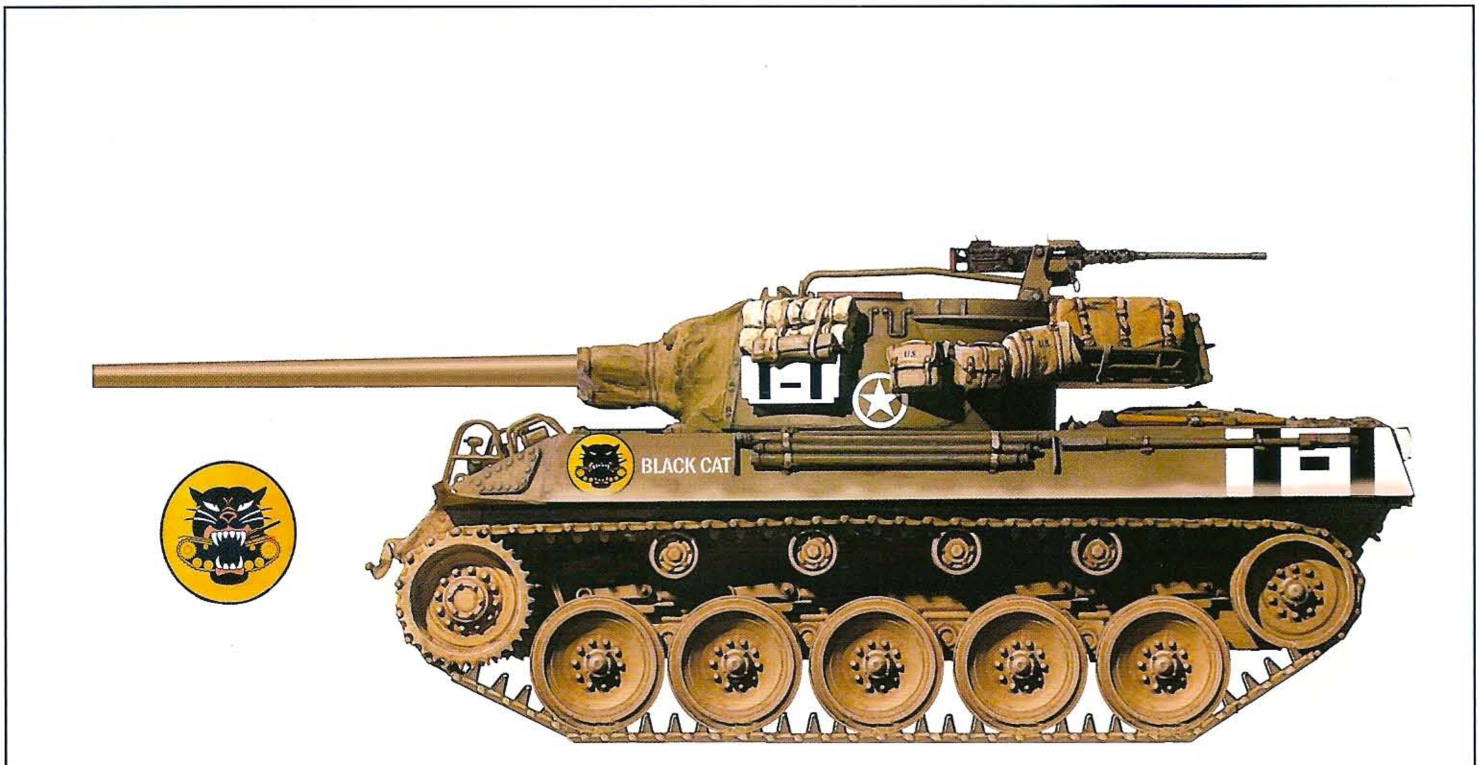
Brummbär, 2/Sturmpanzer Abt.216, Italy, Summer 1944

This mid-production Brummbär provides another example of the typical camouflage patterns in use in the summer of 1944 in the usual Wehrmacht 1943 scheme of RAL 7028 dark yellow with patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown. Once again, the pattern is not especially distinct since the paint was applied in such a thinned form. Once covered with a little dust, the pattern could hardly be seen. This unit used two digit tactical numbers: 1 to 14 for the first company, 15 to 28 for the second, and 29 to 42 for the third. A replacement batch of 10 new strumpanzers which arrived in July 1943 were sequentially numbered 46 to 55.



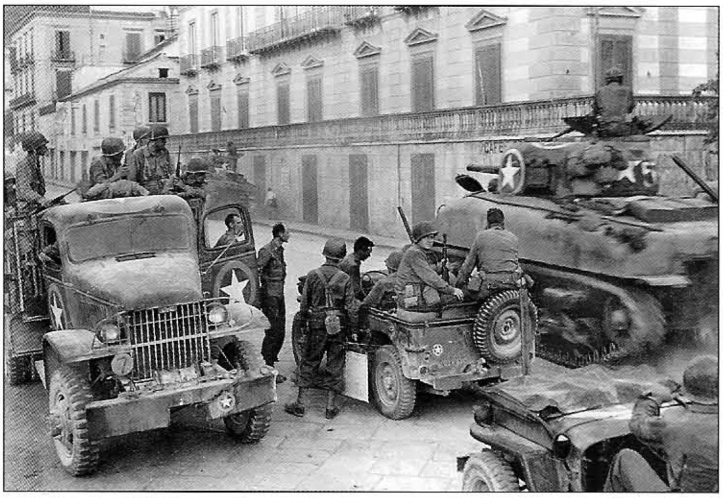
Nashorn, sPz.Jg.Abt.525, Italy, Summer 1944

This Nashorn is painted in the usual Wehrmacht 1943 scheme of RAL 7028 dark yellow with patterns of RAL 6003 olive green and RAL 8017 red brown. In this case, the paint has been better mixed, and the pattern is somewhat more distinct than other examples shown here. The tactical numbers are in black on the hull side like usual, but this unit also applied them to the front gun shield as well.

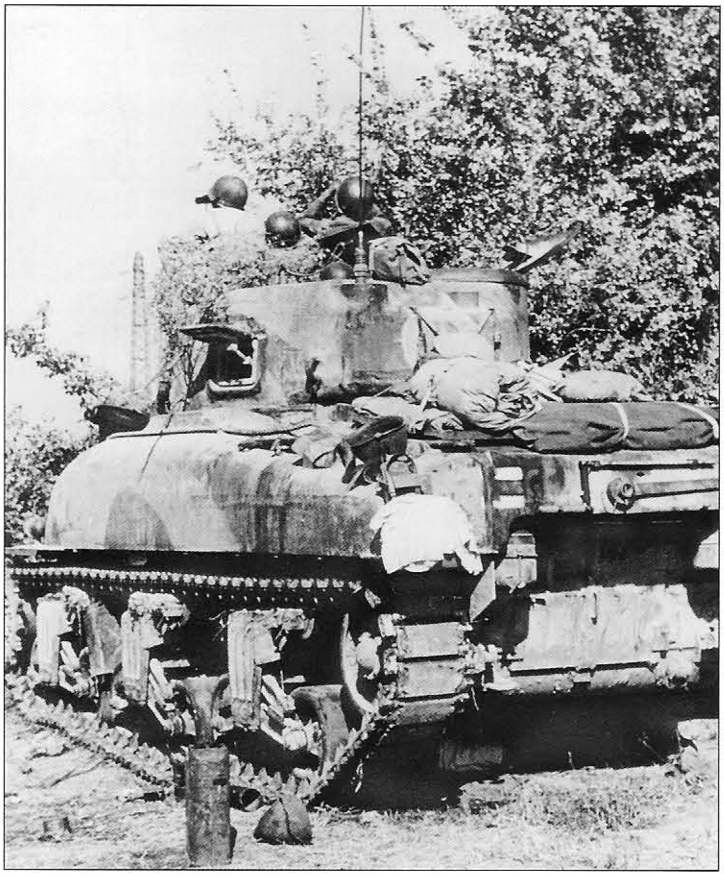


M18, Co. B, 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Po Valley, 1945

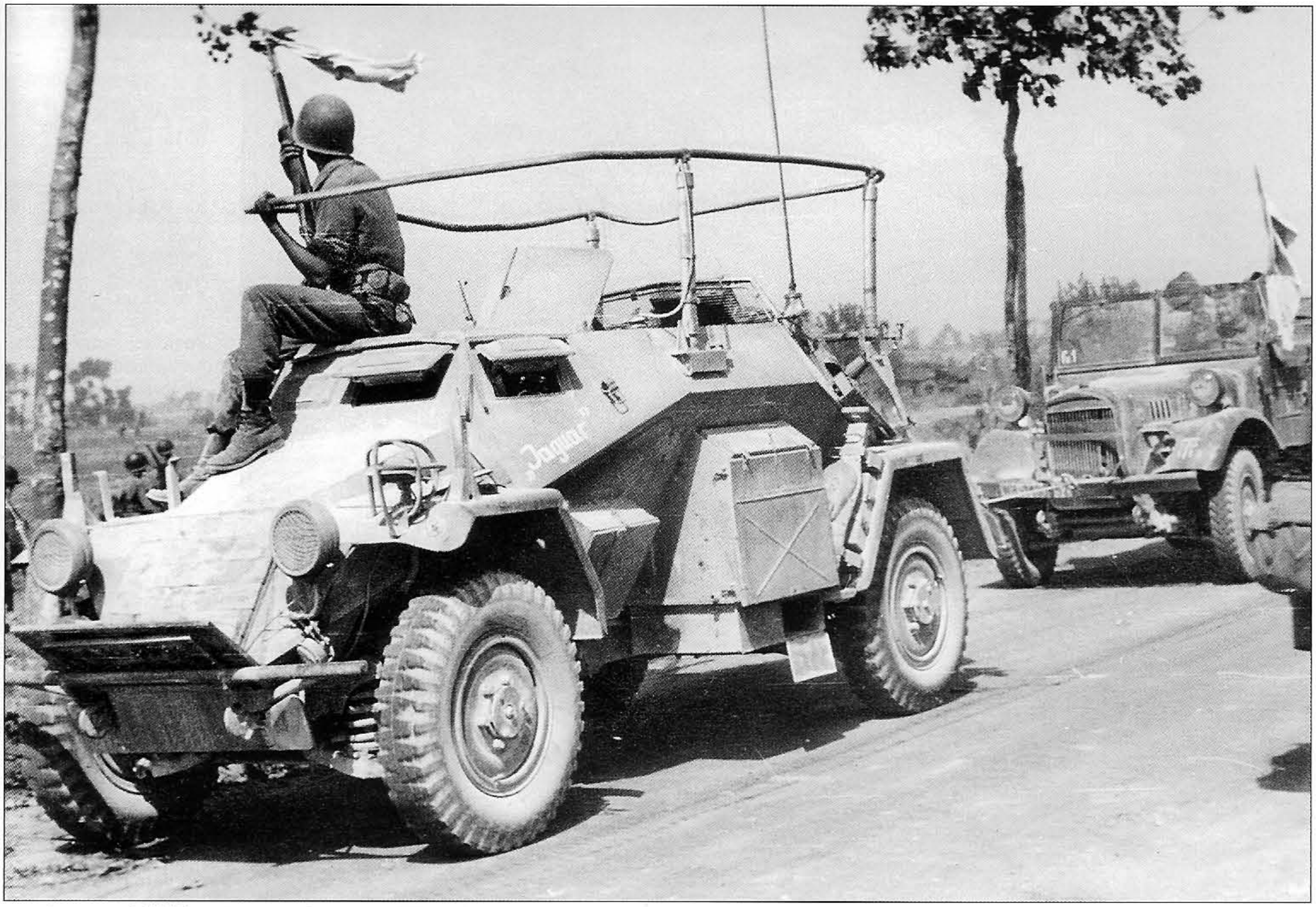
After a small number of T70 76mm gun motor carriages were experimentally deployed at Anzio in the spring of 1944, the only unit to regularly use the M18 in Italy was the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion. This unit was reequipped from towed guns in the summer of 1944, and during reequipping, adopted these distinct tactical numbers consisting of a large pair of number painted on a white background in five positions: on both turret stowage bins, on both rear hull sides, and on the hull rear. The battalion also painted the elaborate black panther insignia of the Tank Destroyer Force on the hull front. The vehicle name is "Black-Cat".



A pair of M4A1 medium tanks move through the streets of Salerno on 17 September 1943. The censor unfortunately has obliterated most of the unit markings and codes.

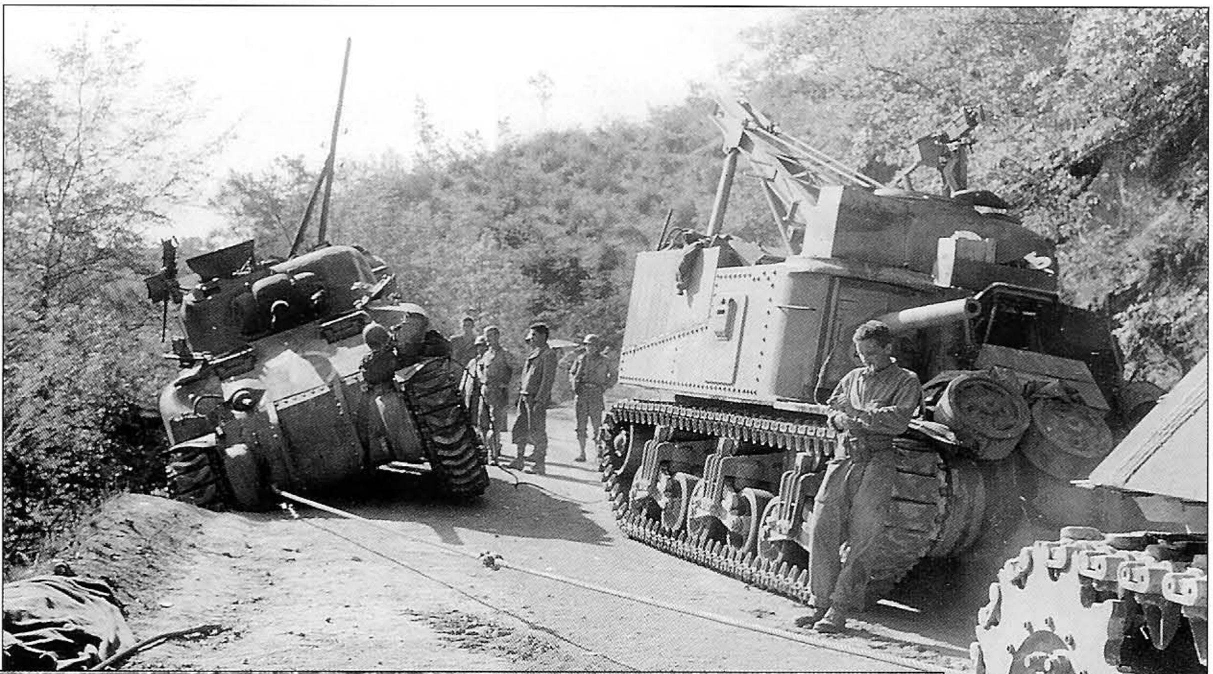


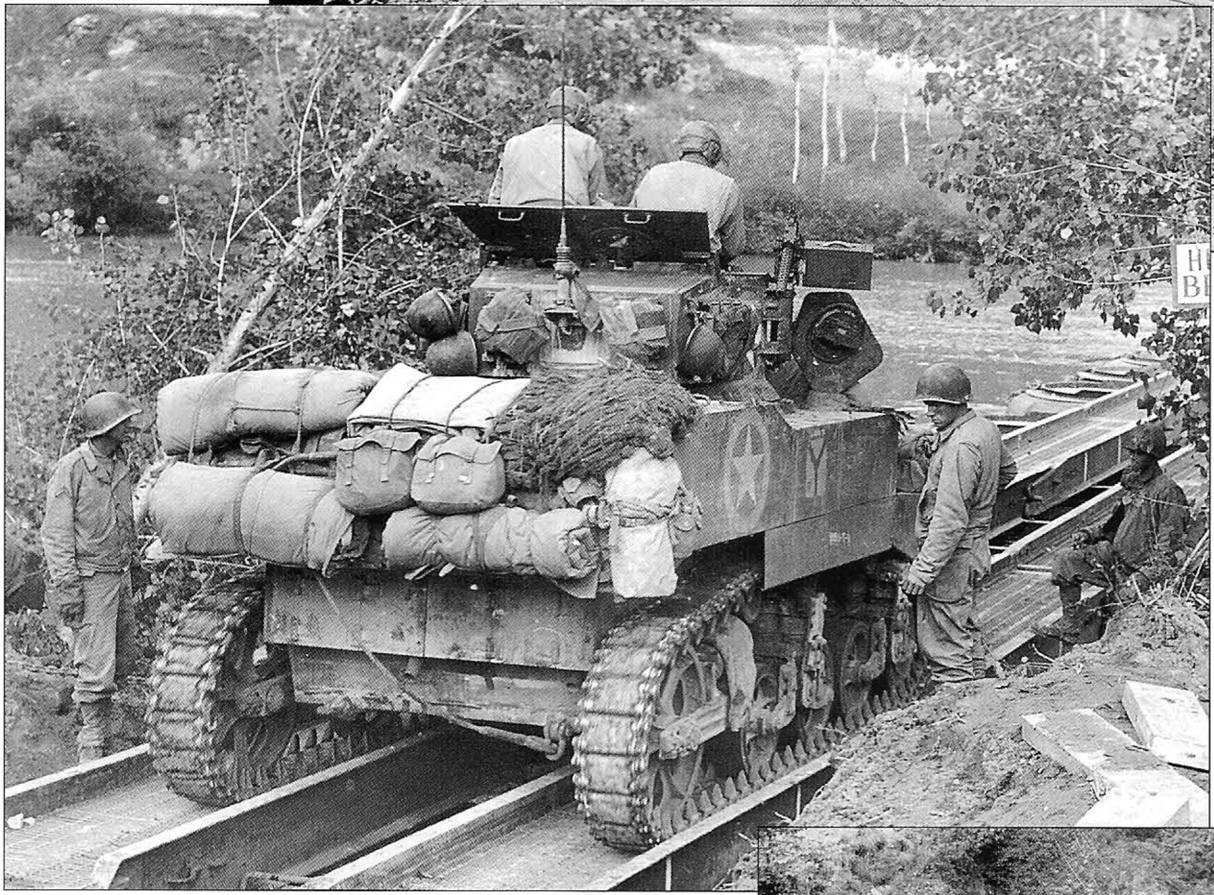
A camouflage painted M4A1 takes up positions along the outer defenses of the Salerno beach-head during the fighting there in mid September 1943.



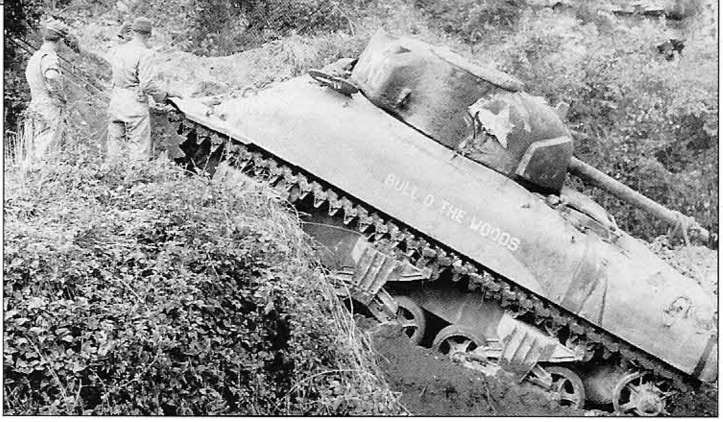
A captured Sd.Kfz.261 armored car named "Jaguar" is used to tow a captured German command vehicle near the Salerno beach-head in late September 1943.

A T2 tank recovery vehicle prepares to pull out a disabled M4A1 tank of the 751st Tank Battalion near Montemarano on 29 September 1943.

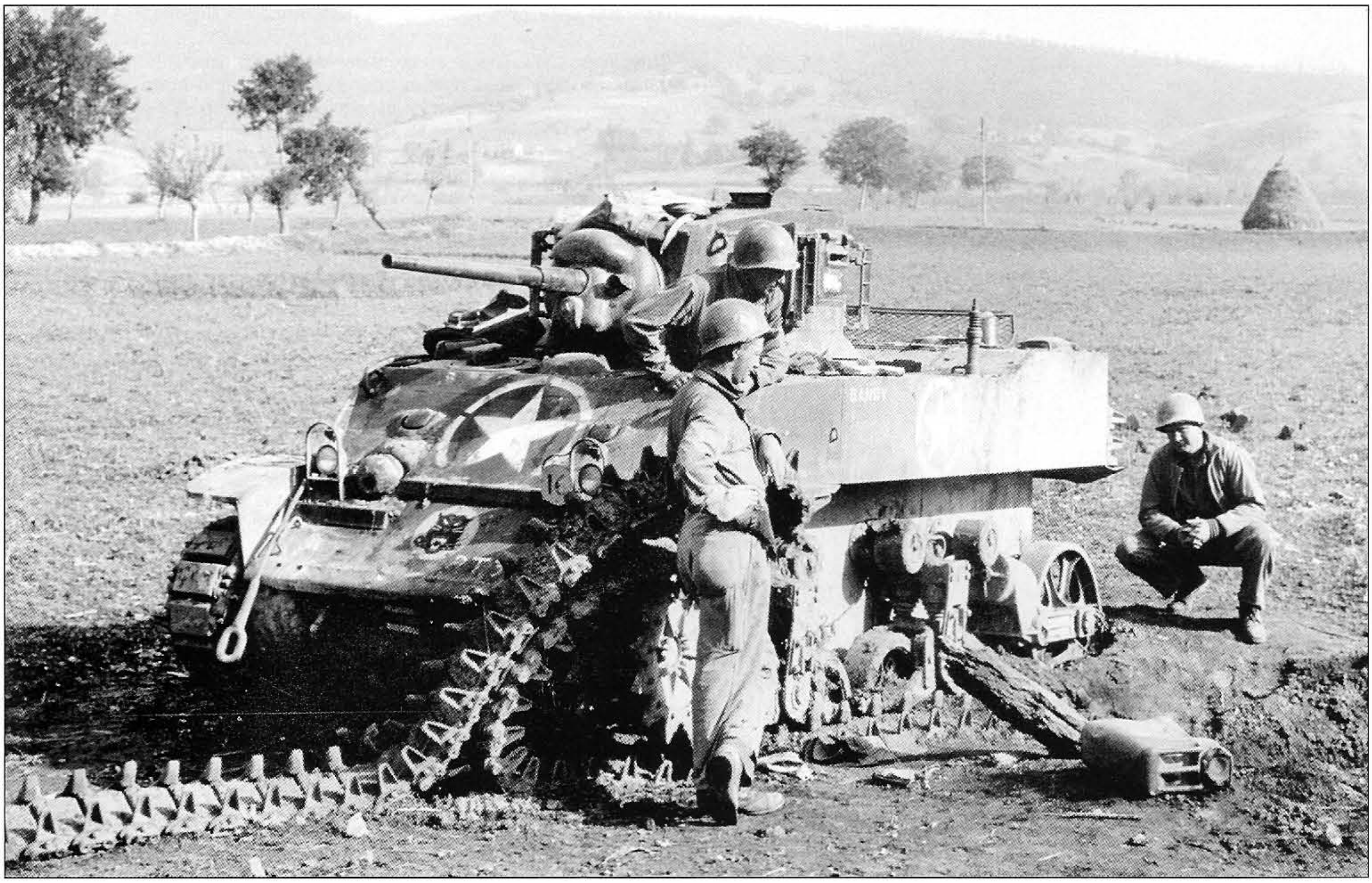




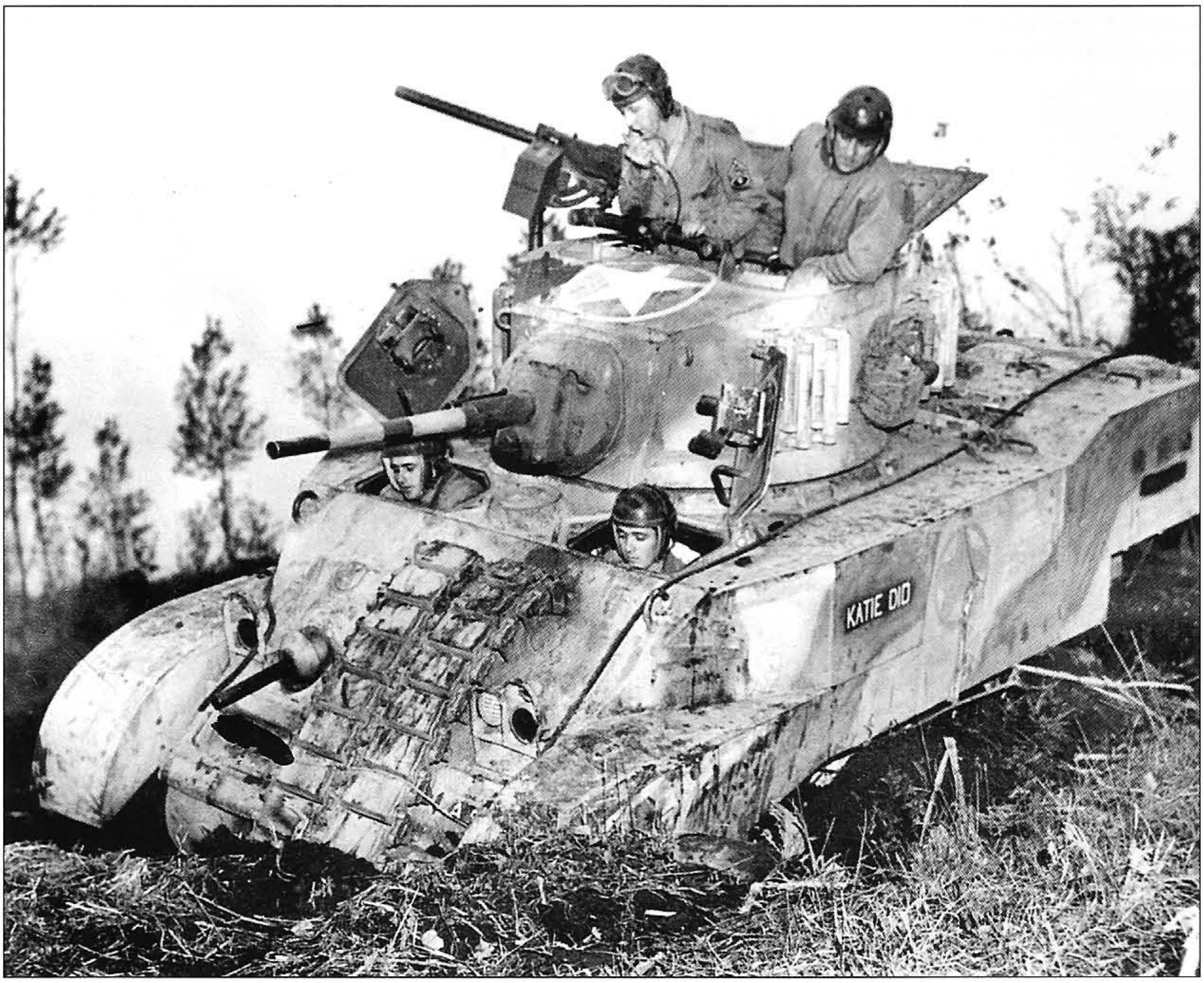
A M5A1 of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion crosses a treadway bridge over the Volturno river on 13 October 1943. Tank destroyer battalions in Italy in 1943 still used the M5 or M5A1 light tank as their scout vehicle until the authorized M8 light armored car became available later in the year.



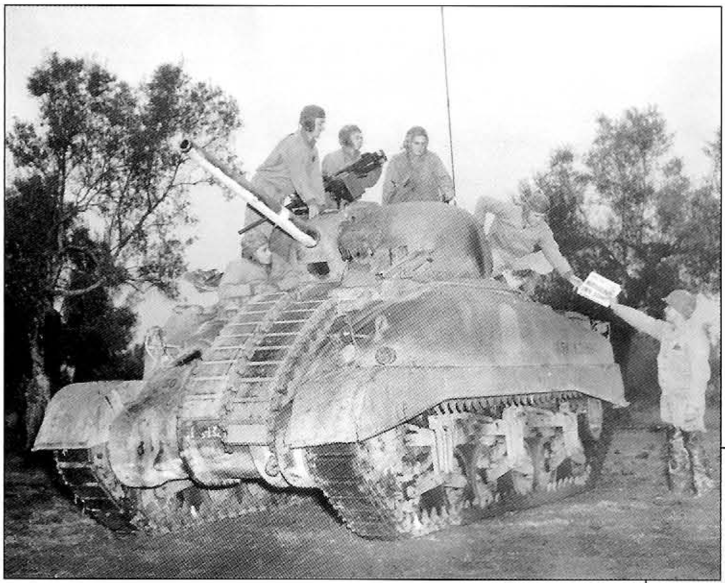
An ordnance crew prepares to recover a M4A1 named "Bull O The Woods" that has slid off a muddy road near Acerno, Italy on 2 November 1943.



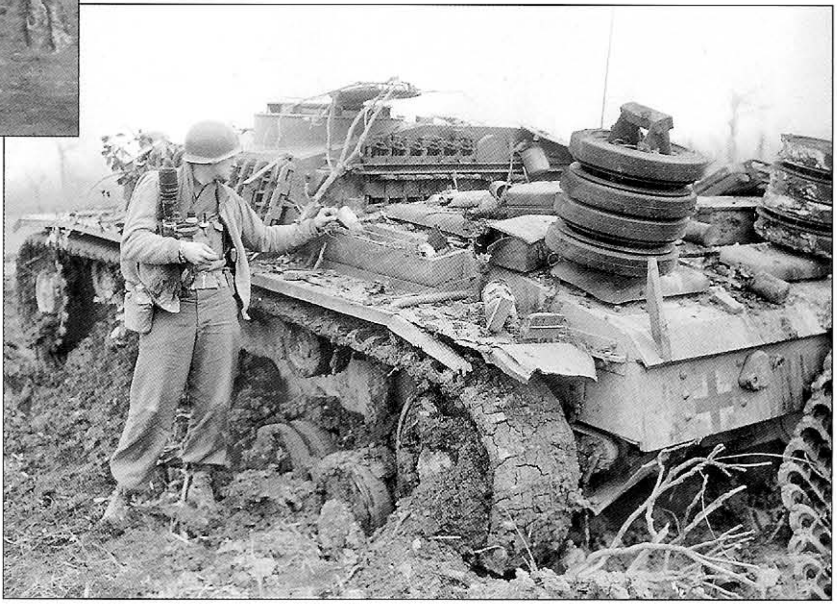
The crew of a M5 named "Sandy" look over the tank suspension after it has become bogged down. The tank has the black panther emblem of the tank destroyer force on the glacis plate, suggesting it is from a tank destroyer battalion reconnaissance company.



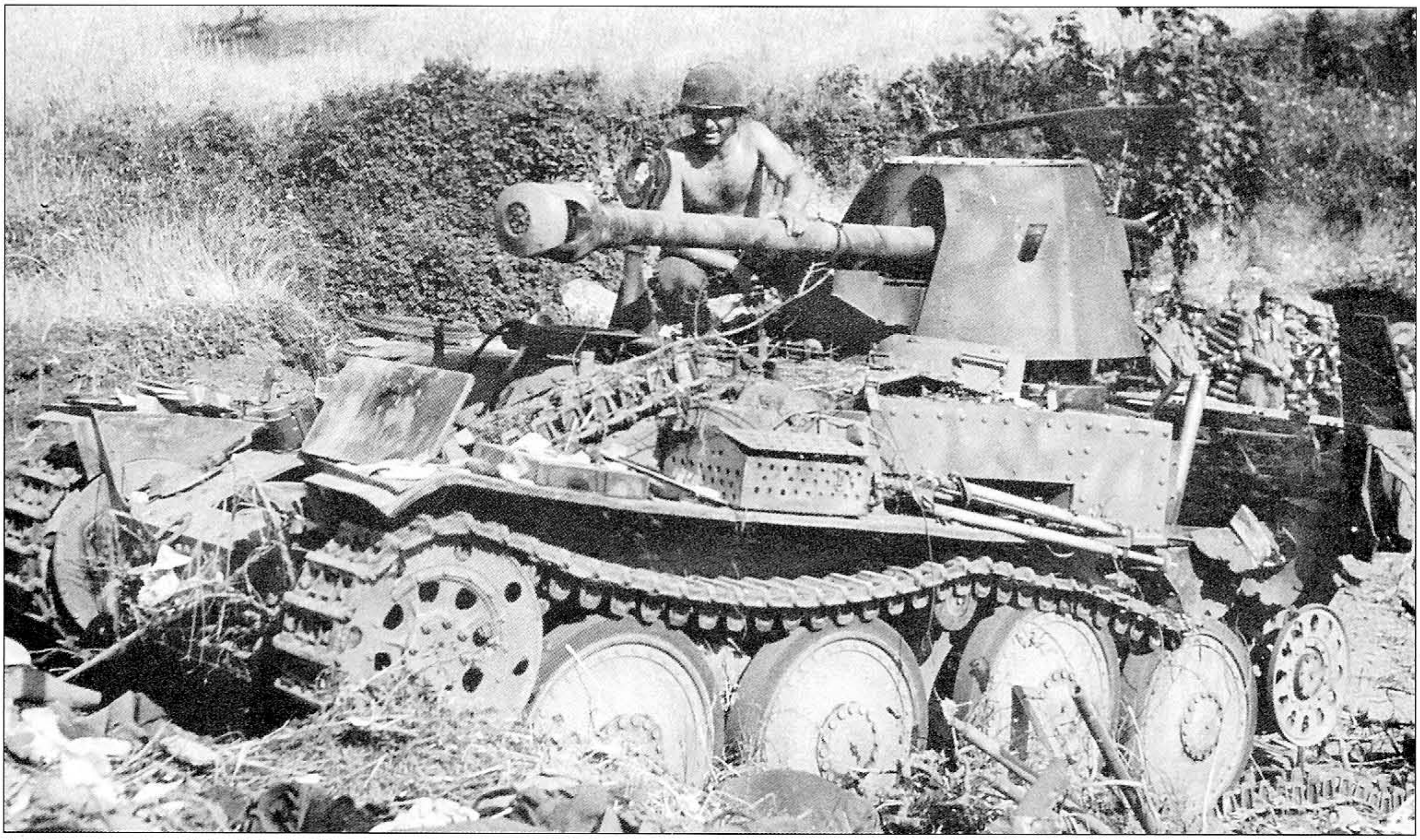
The crew of a camouflage-painted M5A1 named "Katy Did" ponder their options after their vehicle has gotten stuck in mud during operations near Capua, Italy on 29 November 1944.



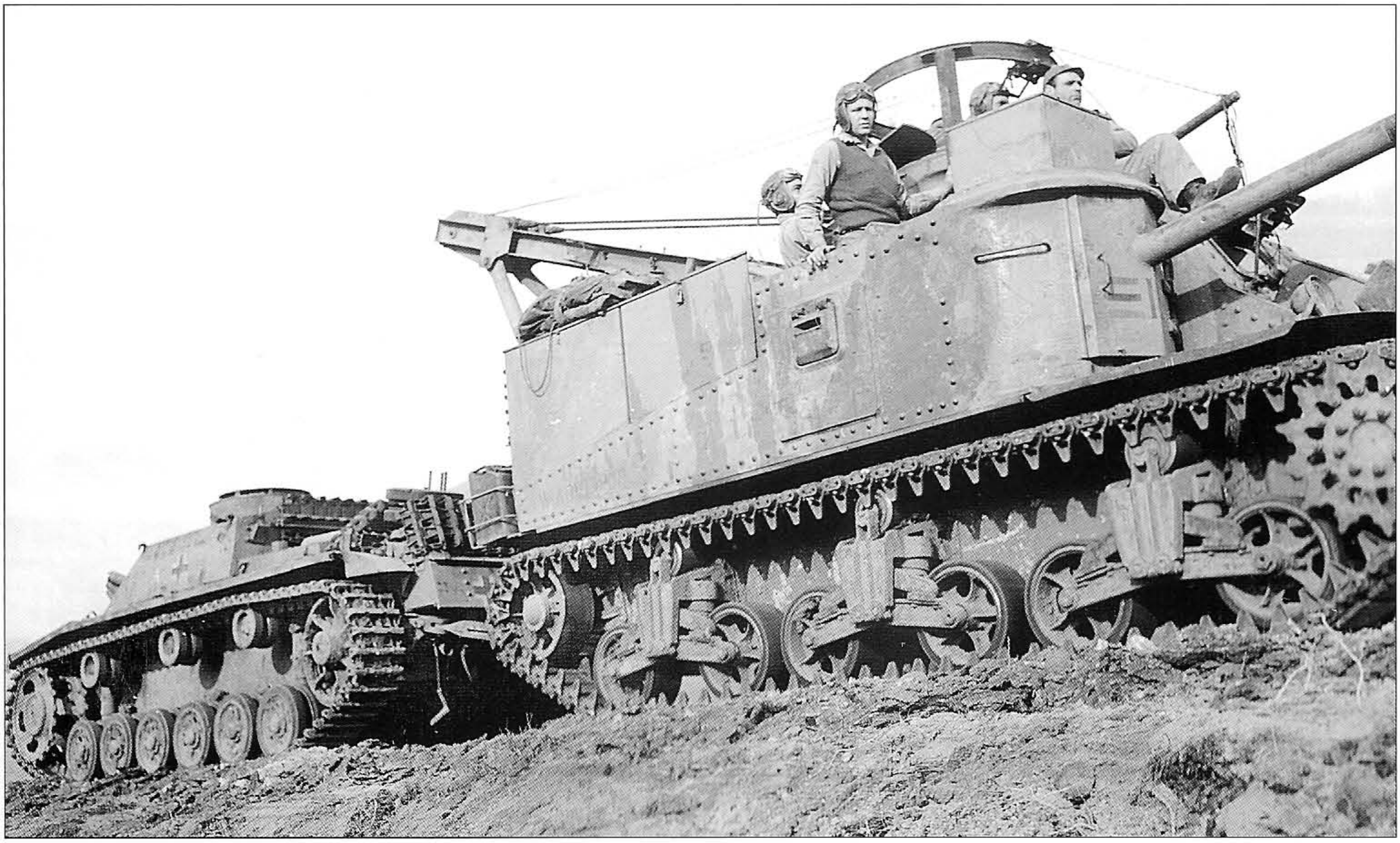
The crew of a M4A1 of the 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division receive a newspaper while bivouacked near Capua on 29 November 1943. This is a very early M4A1 with direct vision ports for the driver and the early pattern suspension, and it exhibits the engineer-approved camouflage practice of painting the area under the gun barrel and transmission housing in white as a form of counter-shading.



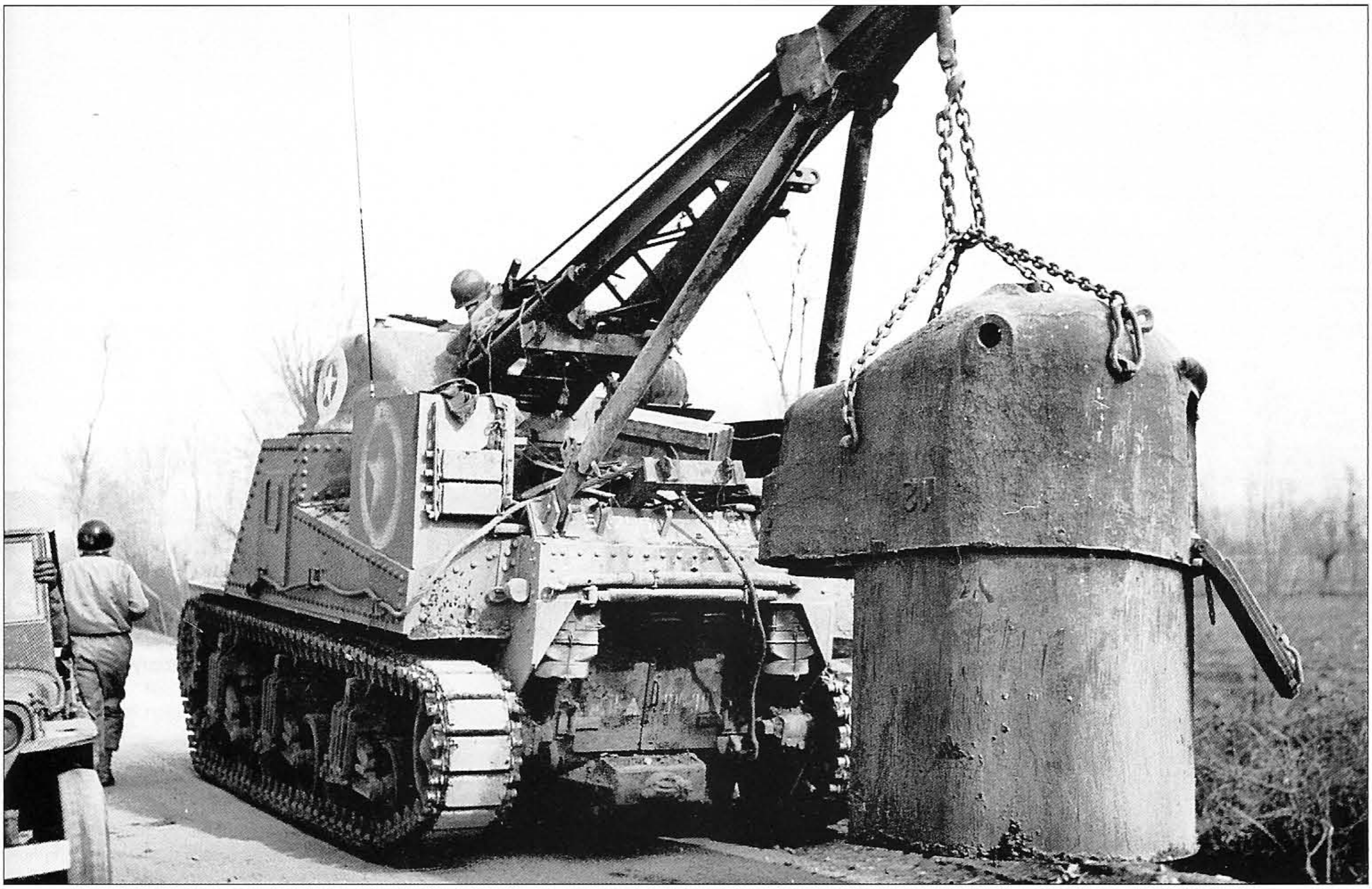
A US Army Signal Corps cameraman looks over a StuG III Ausf.G of Sturmgeschütz-Brigade 242 on 9 January 1944, captured during the fighting near San Vittore.



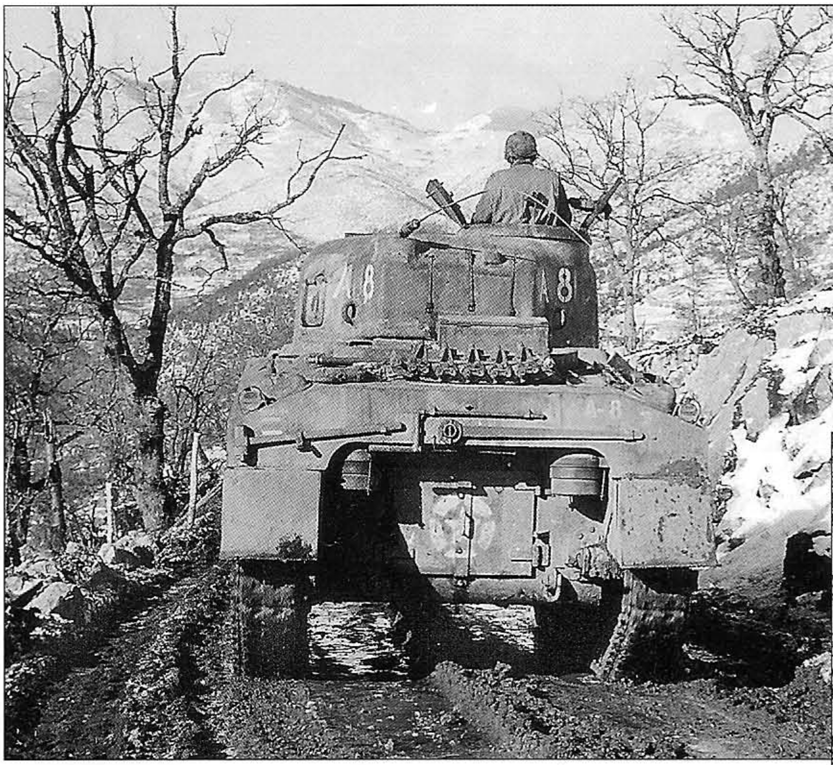
A GI sits on a demolished Marder III tank destroyer which has lost most of its rear fighting compartment.



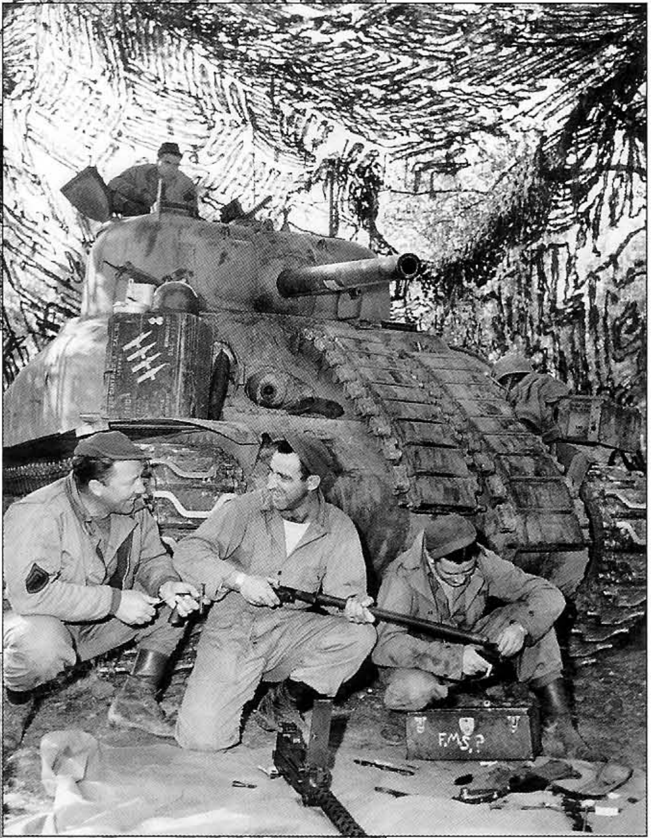
A T2 tank recovery vehicle is to haul away a StuG III near Mt. Lungo on 13 January 1944, probably from the 29.Pz.Gren.Div. The T2 has an improvised machine gun ring on top of the turret to provide some self-defense capability to the crew.



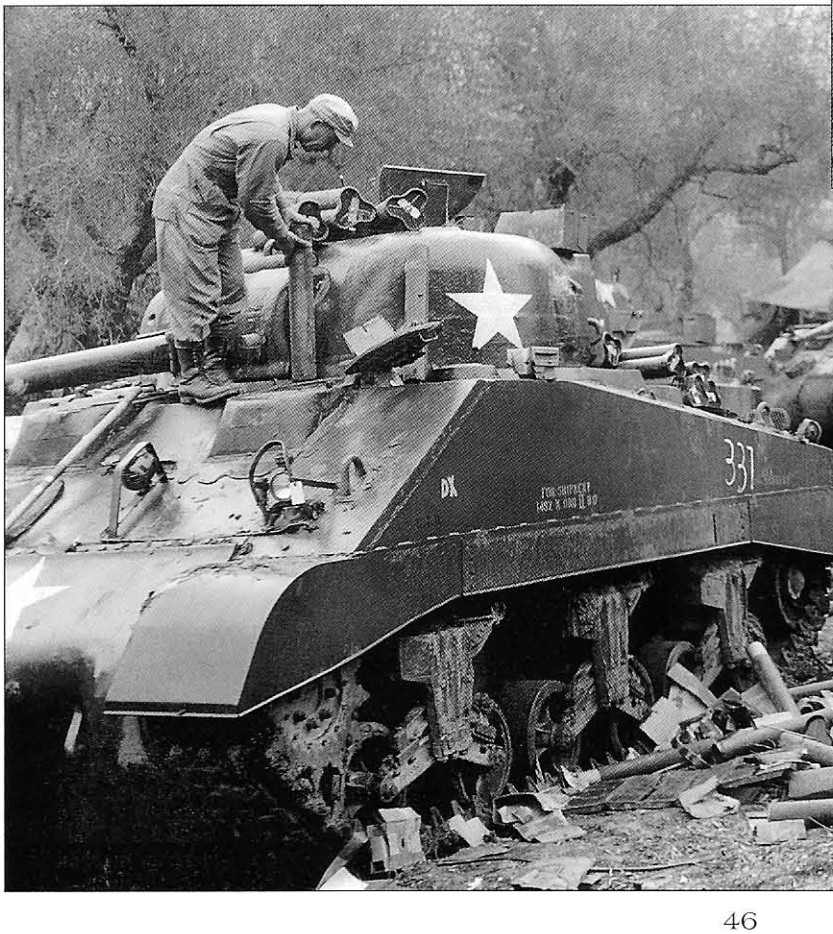
A T2 tank recovery vehicle pulls a German "Crab" panzerturm from its position near Mt. Lungo on 31 January 1944. These cast-armor machine-gun pillboxes were designed to be easily create a defensive zone and were used in modest numbers on the Italian front.



Tank A-8 of Co. A, 755th Tank Battalion moves through the mountains near Pozzilli in January 1944. One curious detail about this tank is that it is employing WE 210 rubber block track, a type usually reserved for British Lend-Lease.

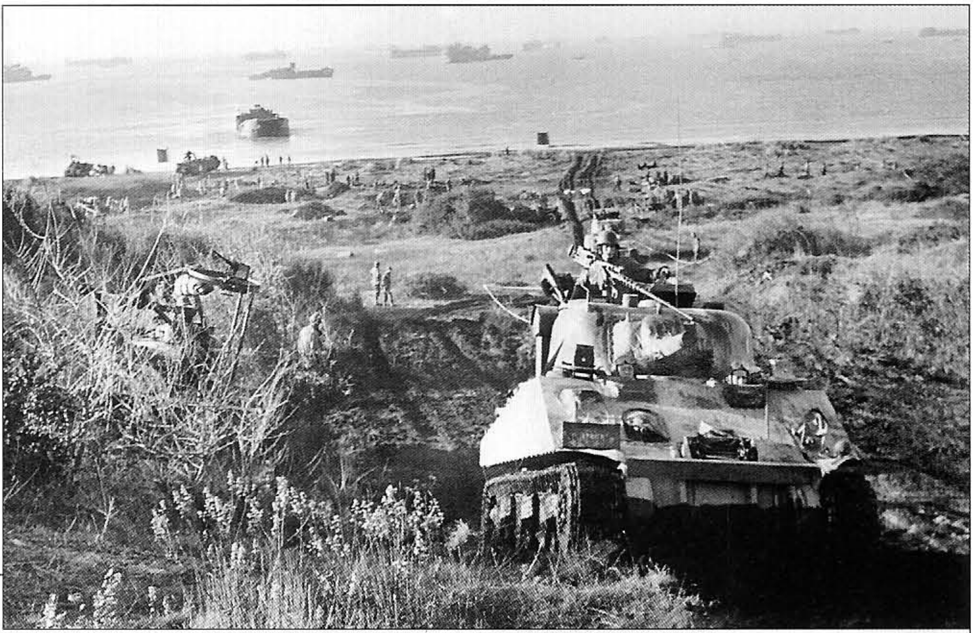


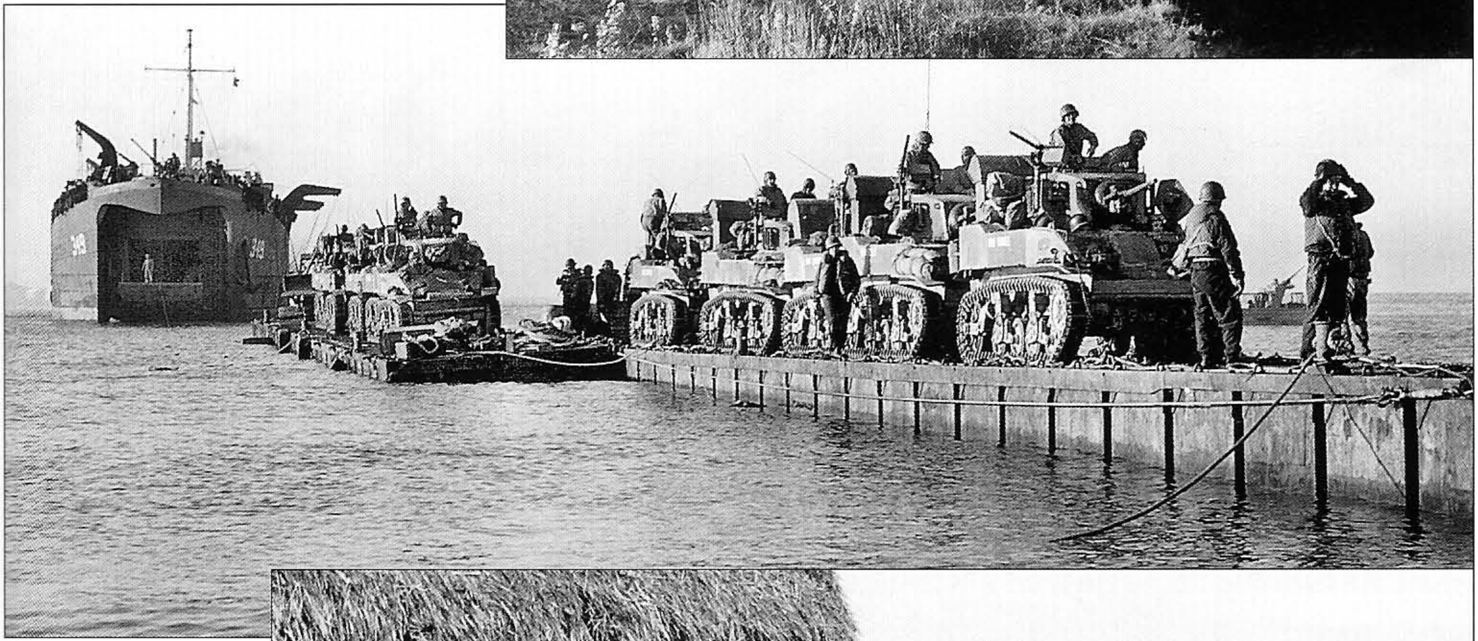
Prior to being issued to tank battalions, replacement tanks were cycled through ordnance units, like the 87th Ordnance Company seen here in Presenzano on 10 January 1944. The ordnance company removed any seals, waterproofing and packing material from the tank, made certain that they were operable, and added a first load of ammunition as seen here. They would also sometimes carry out modifications dictated by higher headquarters such as removing sand-shields, or applying proper markings.



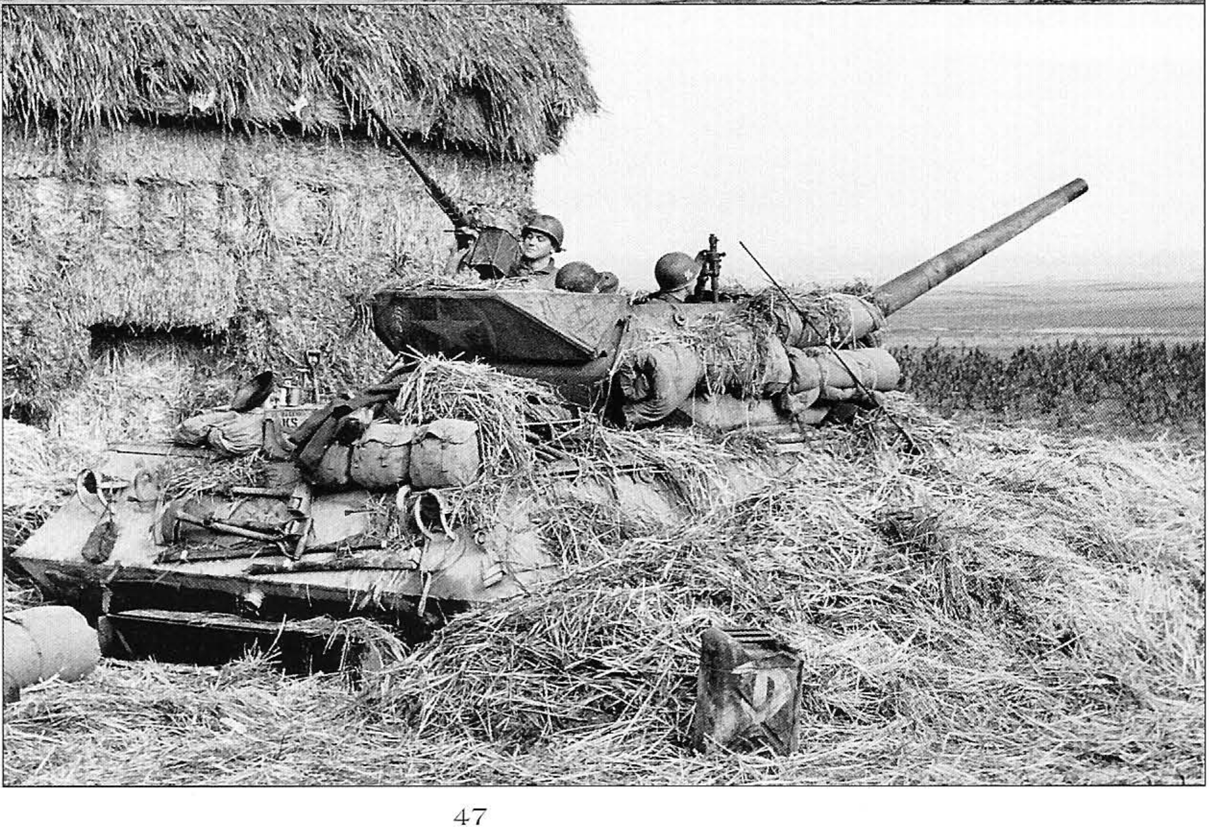
The crew of a M4A1 of the 1st Armored Division clean their tank's machine guns during a lull along the Cassino front on 6 February 1944. At the end of January, the division had split in two with the CCB remaining on the southern front near Mignano supporting the II Corps, with the rest of the division moved to the Anzio beach-head to support the VI Corps.

A M4 medium tank of the 751st Tank Battalion climbs one of the hills along the Anzio beach-head on the morning of 22 January 1944. The three platoons of Company A were landed in the pre-dawn hours to support the US 3rd Infantry Division at Anzio.

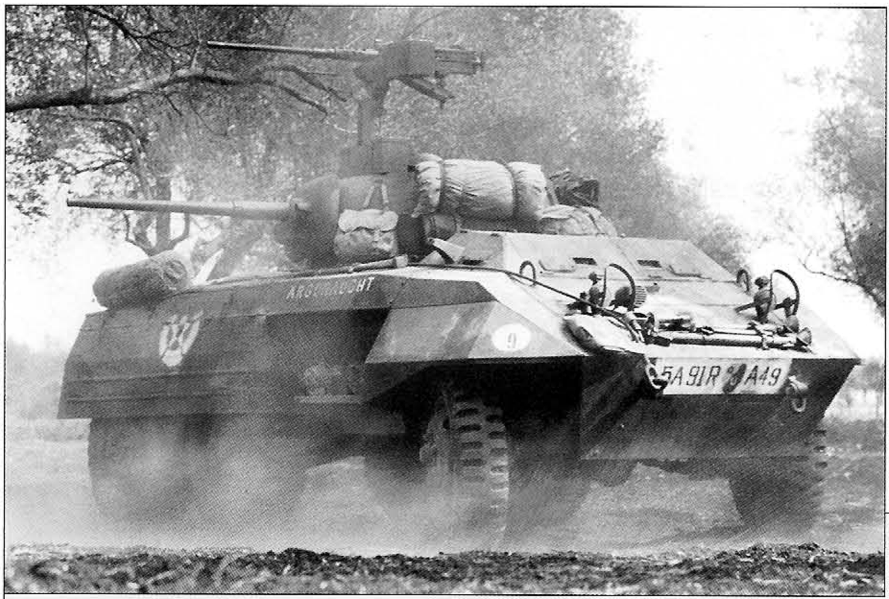




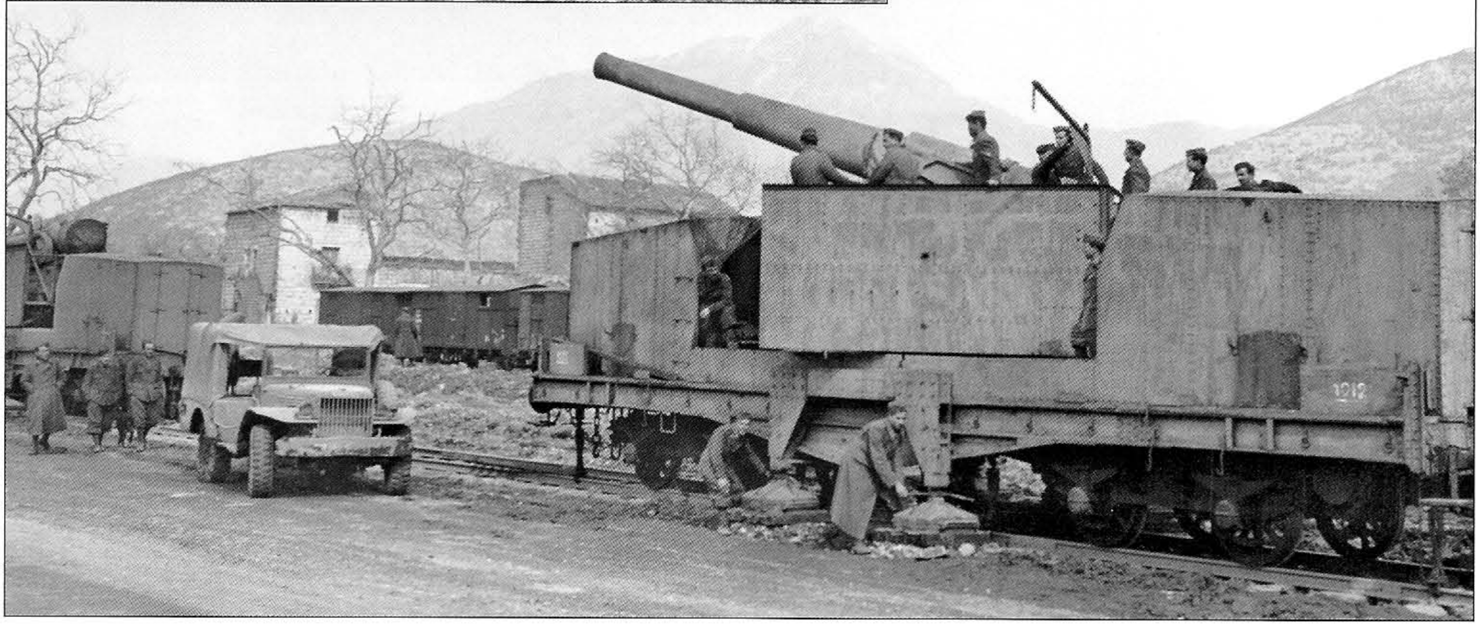
The M5A1 light tanks of Company D, 751st Tank Battalion are brought ashore from an LST at Anzio on 22 January 1944.



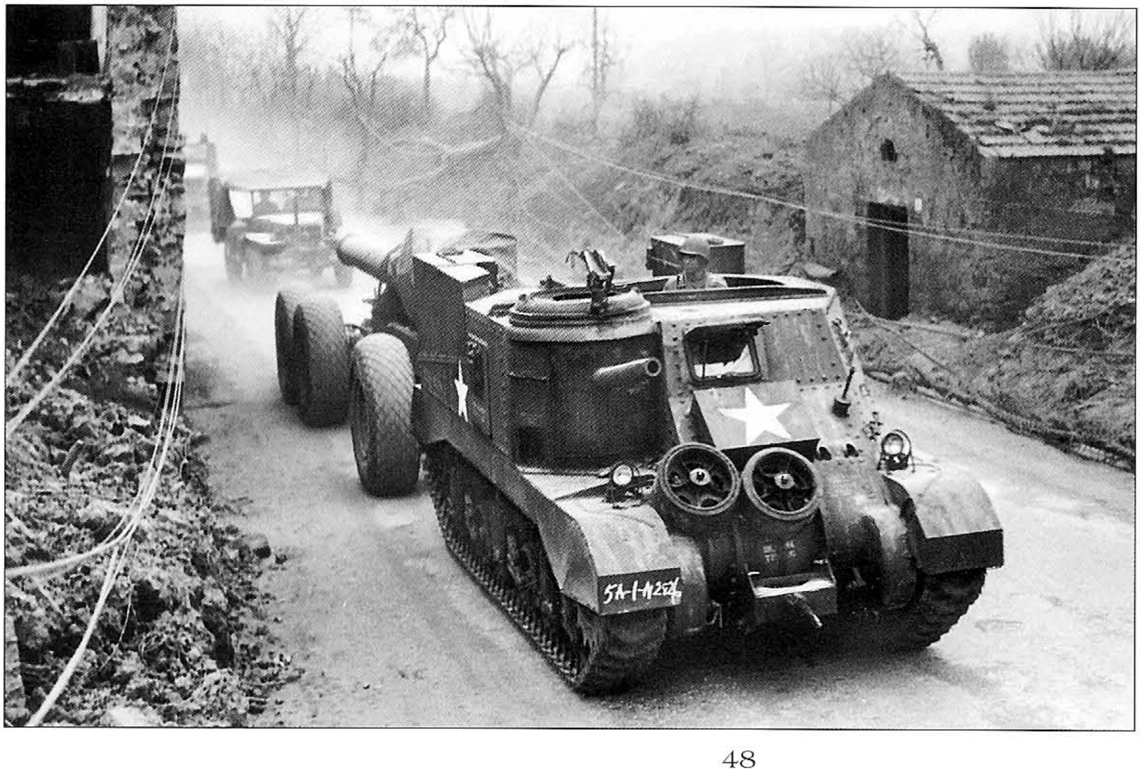
A well camouflaged M10 3-inch GMC is dug in near a large haystack in the Anzio beach-head.



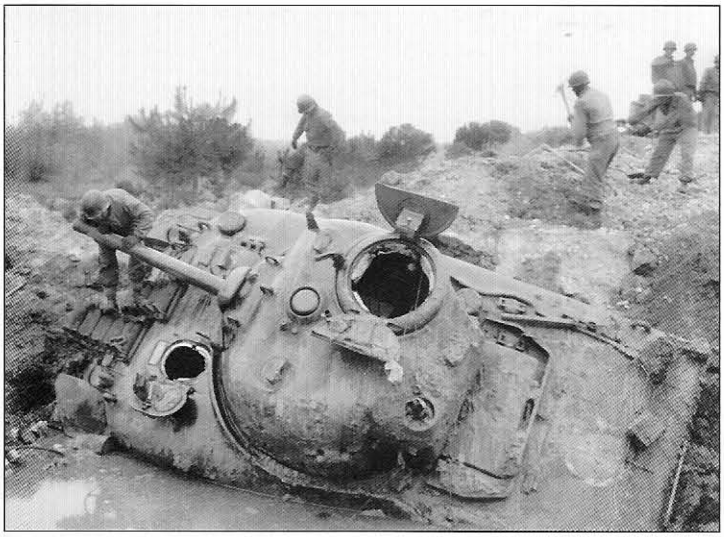
The M8 armored car first went into combat in late January 1944 in Italy with the Fifth Army's 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), and with the 1st Armored Division's 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. The 91st CRSM saw action on the Cassino front, and this photo shows a vehicle of A Troop near Cassino on 20 February 1944. The crews have already started to fit improvised .50 cal machine gun mounts to the vehicles.



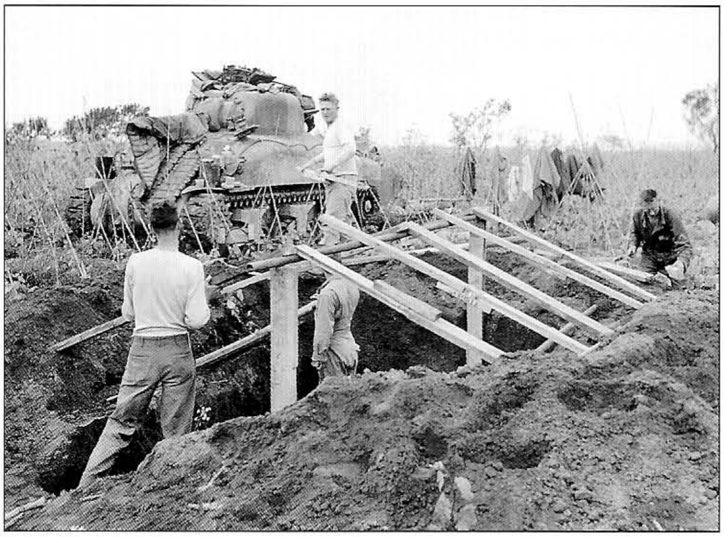
After Italy switched sides in 1943, a number of Italian units joined the Allies. Among these was the 1 Ragruppamento Motorizzato of the Corpo Italiano di Liberazione (CIL) which operated these mobile rail guns based on the French 194mm gun. They operated in the Cassino sector on the Cassino-Naples rail line, and one of the batteries is seen here in operation near Mignano on 8 March 1944.



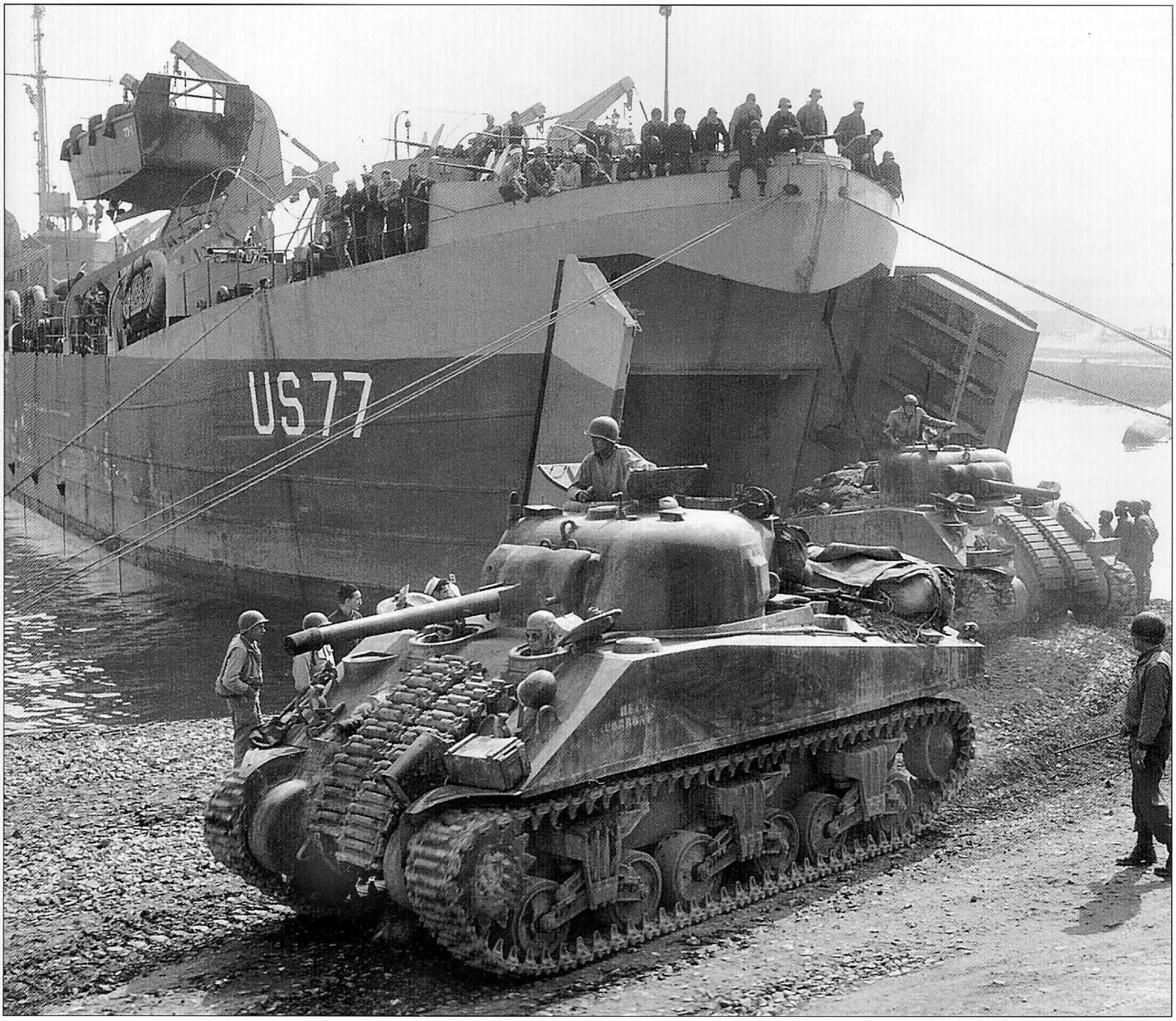
A M33 prime mover is used to tow an 8 inch gun or 240mm howitzer barrel near Cassino on 29 March 1944. The M33 was based on the M3 medium tank, minus its usual turret and hull mounted 75mm gun. It was used to tow super-heavy artillery until the long delayed M6 high speed tractor became available.



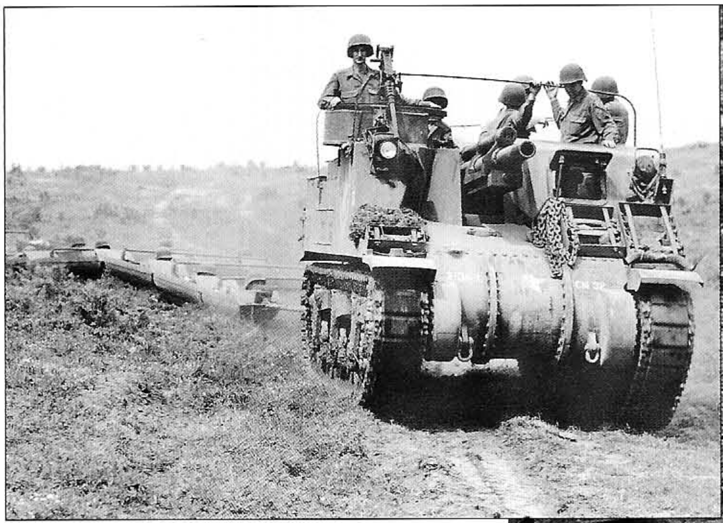
Tankers of the 1st Armored Division work to extract a M4A1 which has slid off a muddy road near Littoria on 15 April 1944. They have already managed to winch the tank partly out of the waterlogged hole.



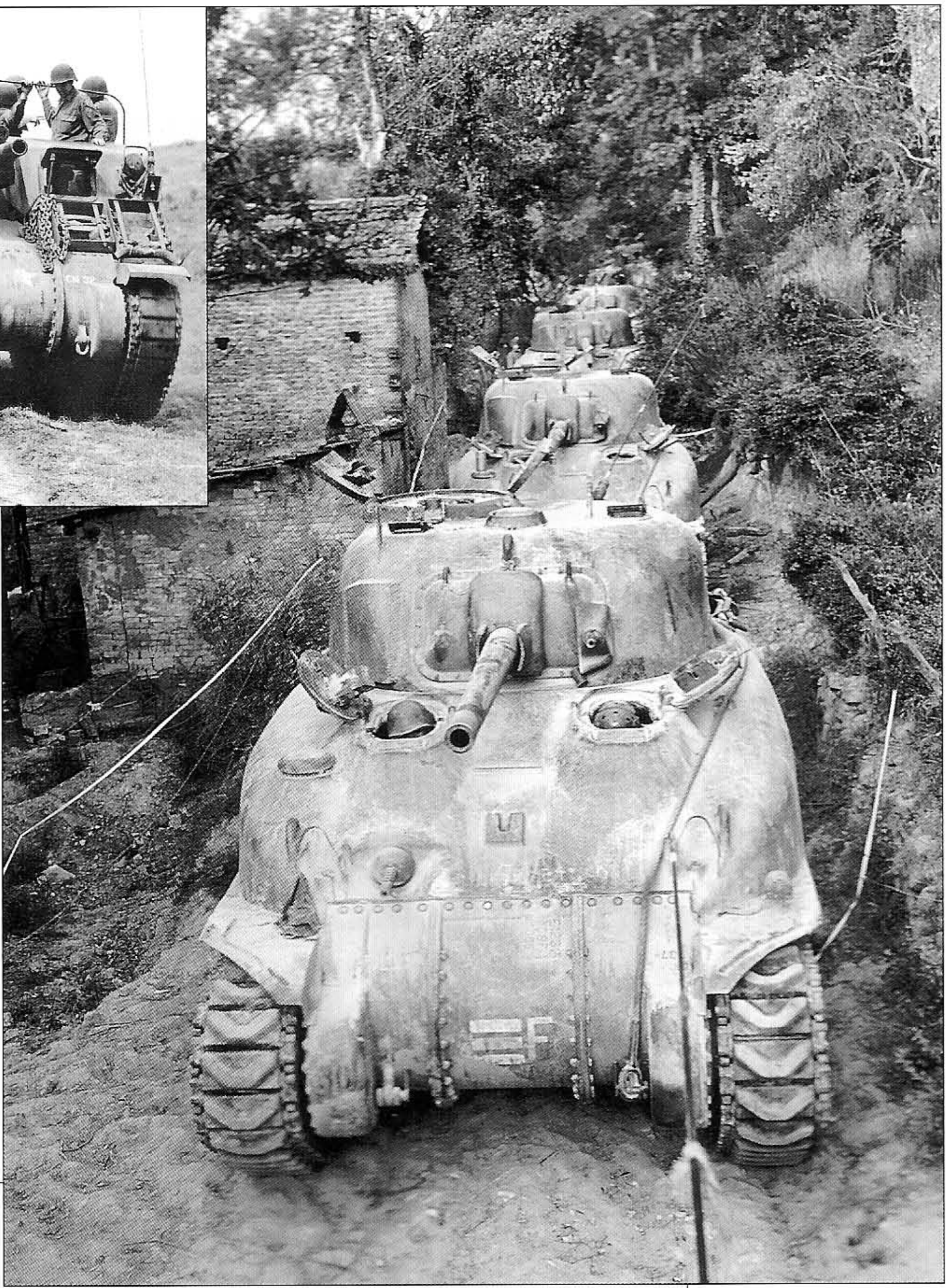
Shortly after landing on the Anzio beach-head, a M4A1 crew from the 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division prepares a buried shelter near their tank.



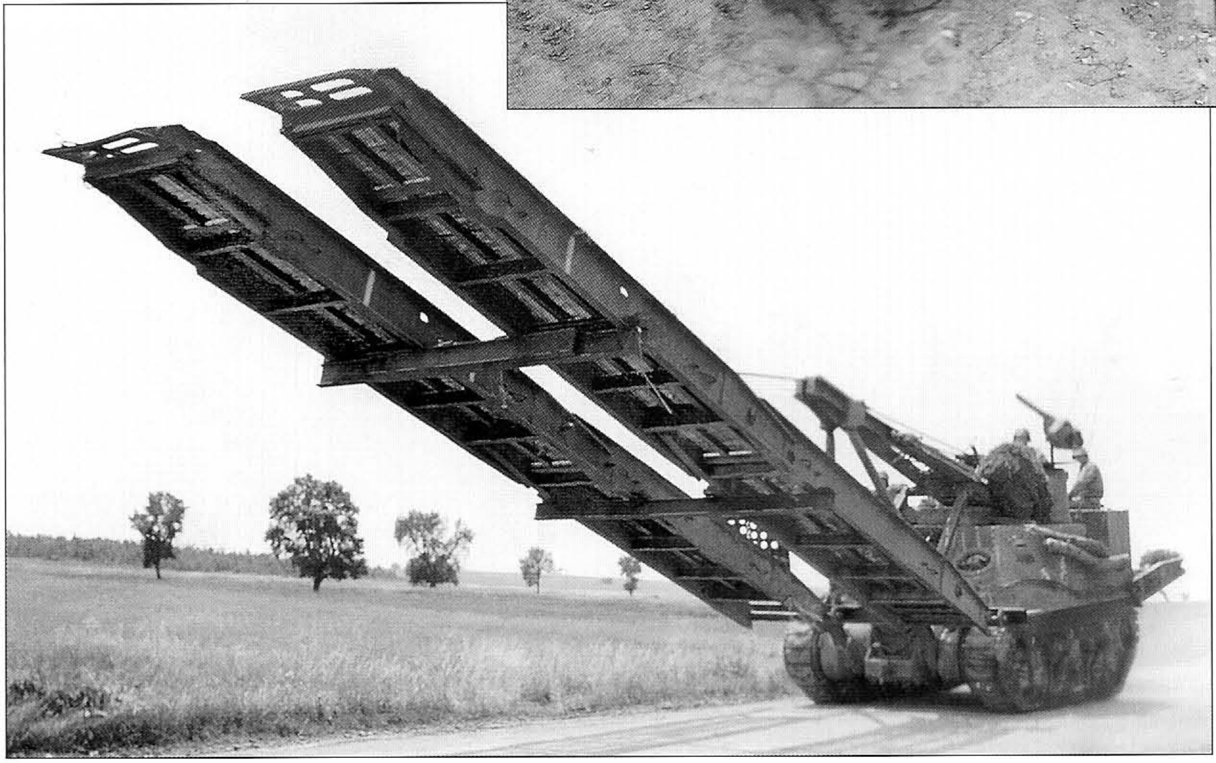
In anticipation of the break-out operations from the Anzio bridgehead, the 1st Armored Division's CCB was united with the rest of the division. Here, some M4 tanks of the 13th Armored Regiment come ashore at Anzio from a LST on 27 April 1944.



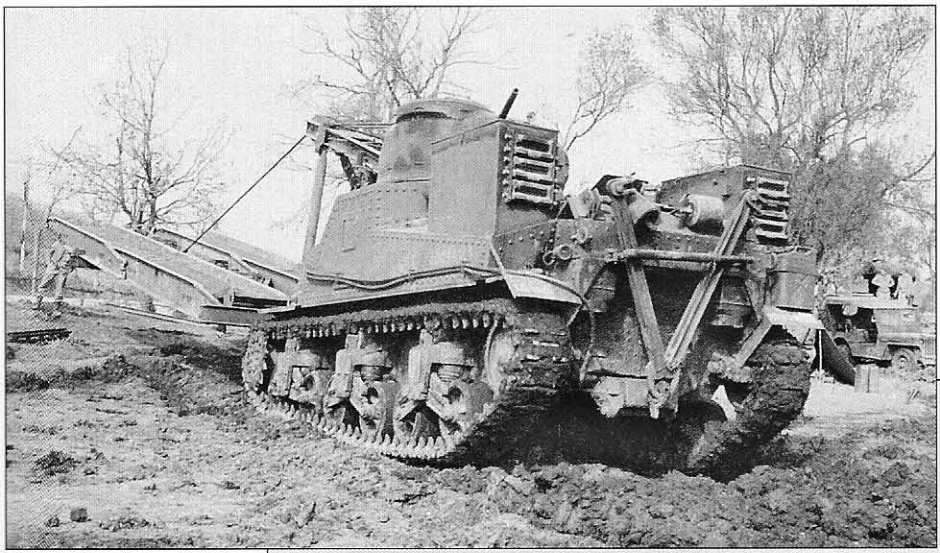
In preparation for the break-out from the Anzio beach-head, there were experiments to develop a method to carry infantry forward under protection using "battle sleds", an idea promoted by the commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, Gen. J.W. "Iron Mike" O'Daniel. This is a training exercise on 9 May 1944 with some of these metal sleds being towed behind a M7 105mm HMC.



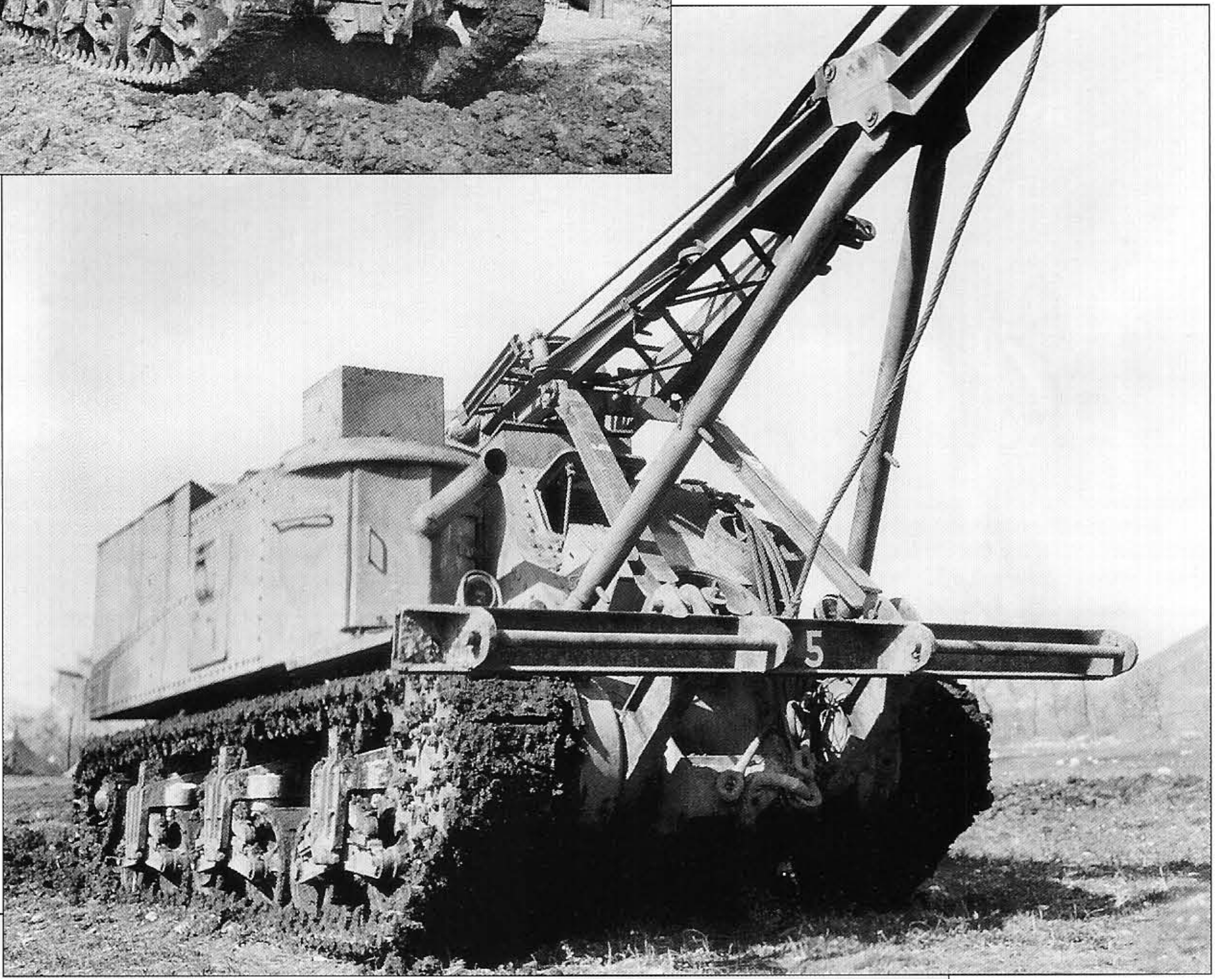
A column of M4A1 tanks of the 760th Tank Battalion move forward near Turo on 12 May 1944 along a mine-cleared road. The white tape on either side of the road is an engineer marker to distinguish cleared paths. The colored bar marking on the transmission cover is an ETOUSA shipping marking commonly used in the Italian campaign.



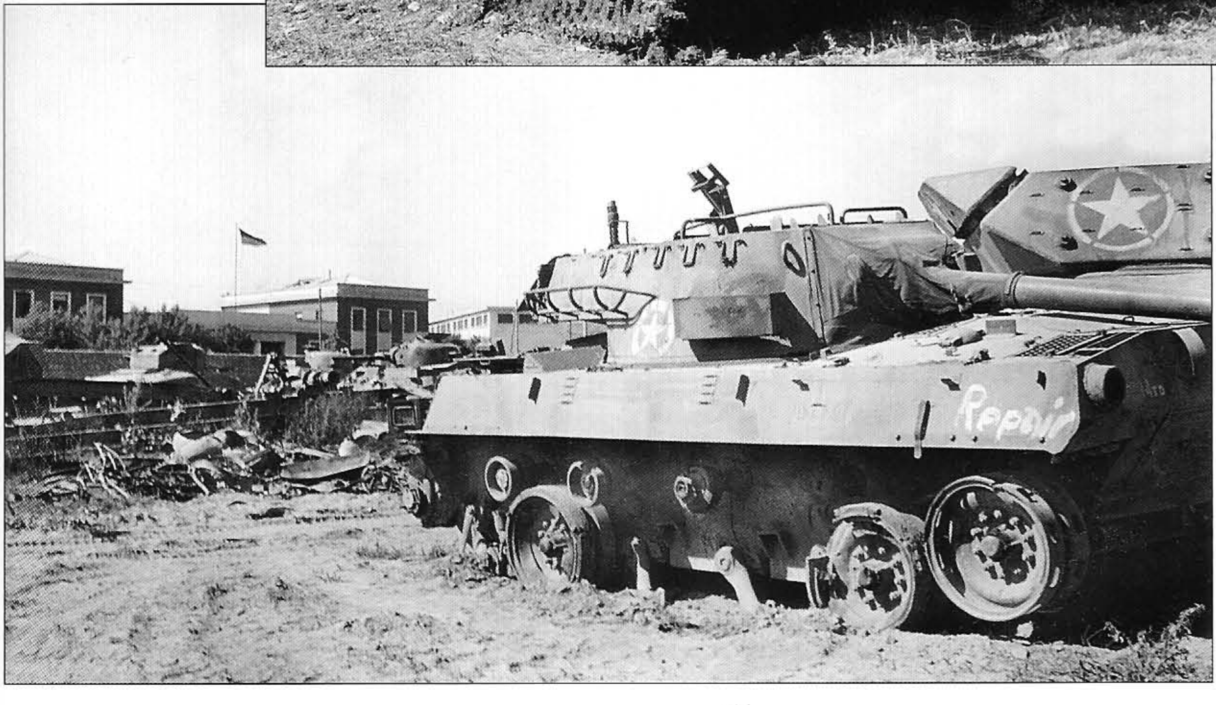
The 16th Engineer Battalion came up with the idea of deploying a length of treadway bridge in front of a T2 tank recovery vehicle to create an assault bridging vehicle to rapidly overcome tank traps. These were used during the Anzio break-out operation and one is seen here on 24 May 1944.



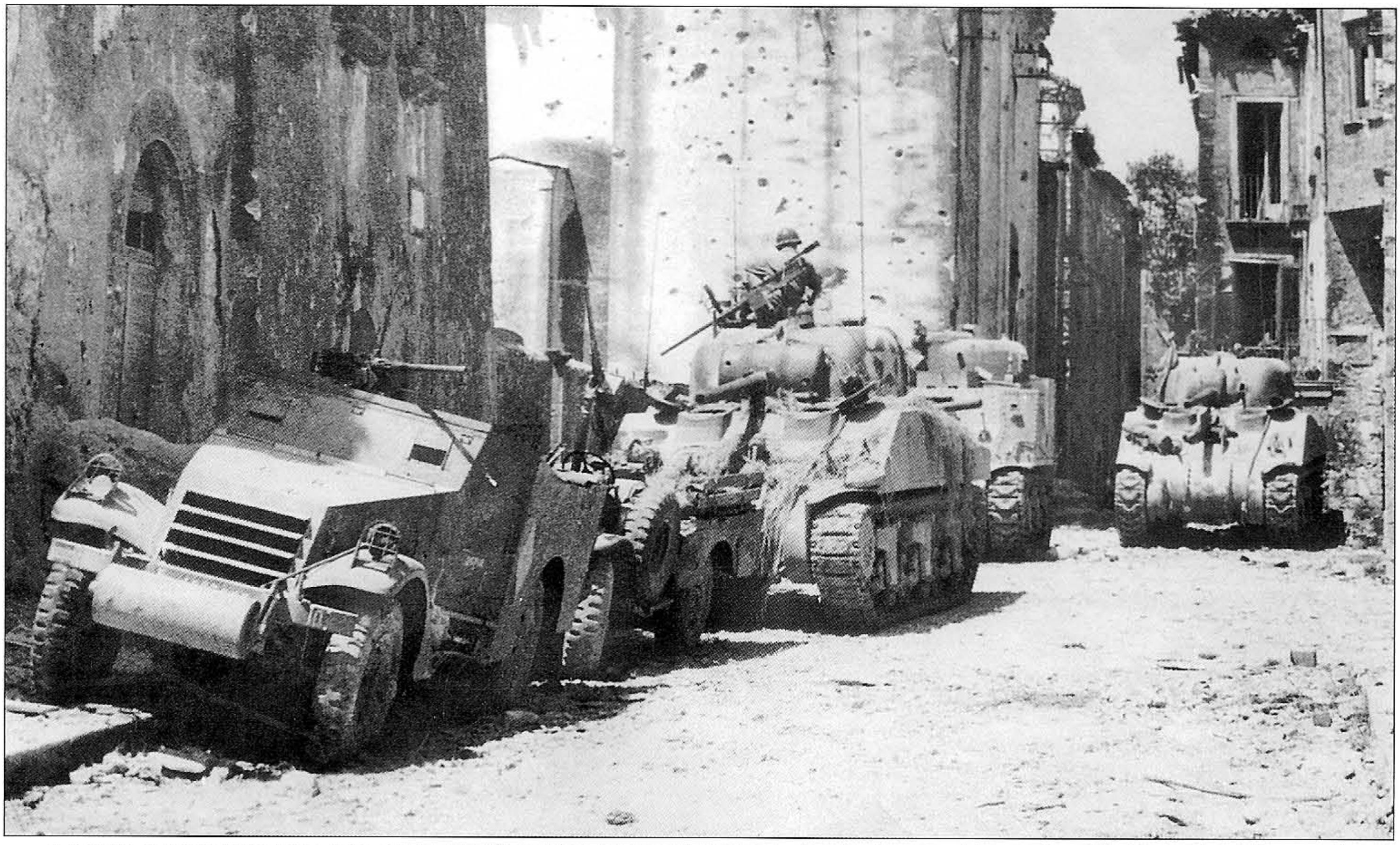
This is an interesting view of the improvised treadway bridge carrier from the rear being used by the 13th Armored Regiment.



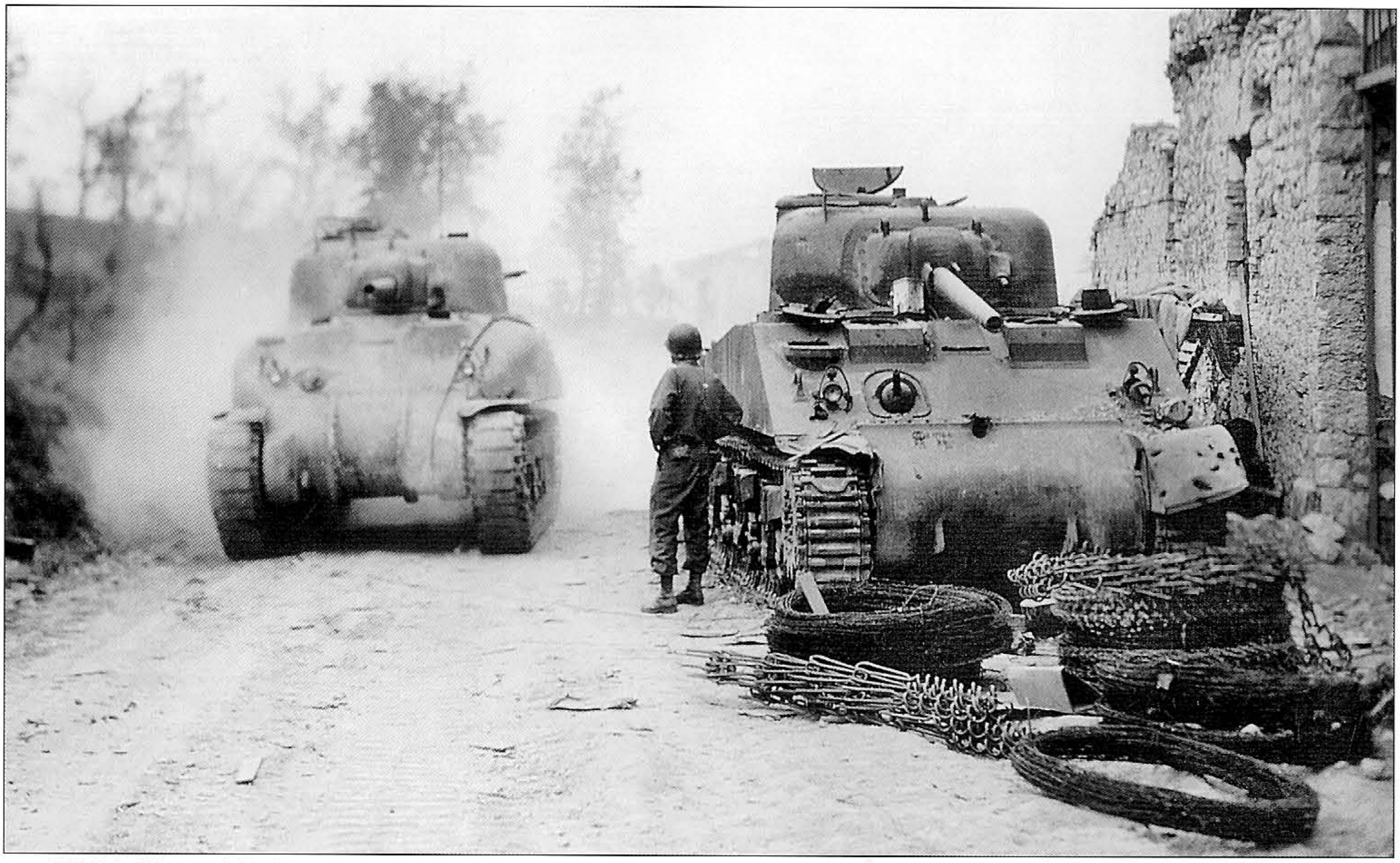
This is a close-up of the assault bridging vehicle based on the T2 tank recovery vehicle built by the 16th Engineer Battalion. This shows how the crane was braced to withstand the heavy weight of the bridge and also shows the beam fitted across the front of the vehicle where the treadway bridge was connected.



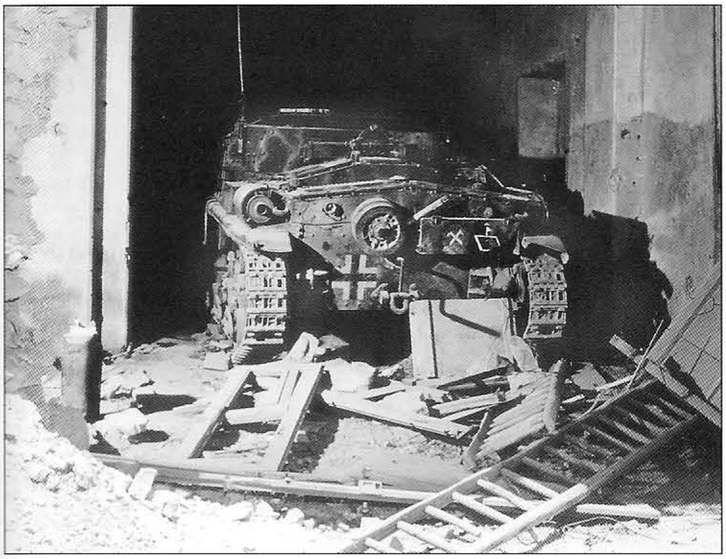
A tank graveyard in the Anzio beachhead area contains a glimpse of one of the rarer AFVs used during the Anzio fighting, one of the early T70 76mm gun motor carriages. A small number of these were deployed for trials at Anzio prior to the series production M18 76mm GMC being widely deployed. This particular one served with the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion before being disabled.



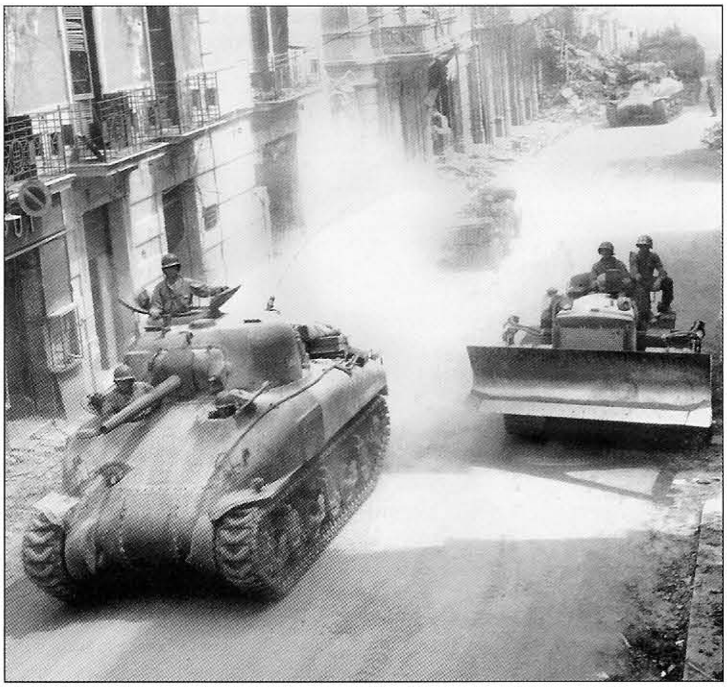
A column of armor rests in the ruins of San Giorgio a Liri on 17 May 1944 shortly after the town was taken by the CEF (French Expeditionary Corps) during the fight for the Gustav line. The lead vehicle is a French M3A1 scout car, of the 1st RFM with the 1804 Napoleonic flag insignia. Behind it is a pair of M4A1 medium tanks and a T2 recovery vehicle from the 757th Tank Battalion which supported the French attack.



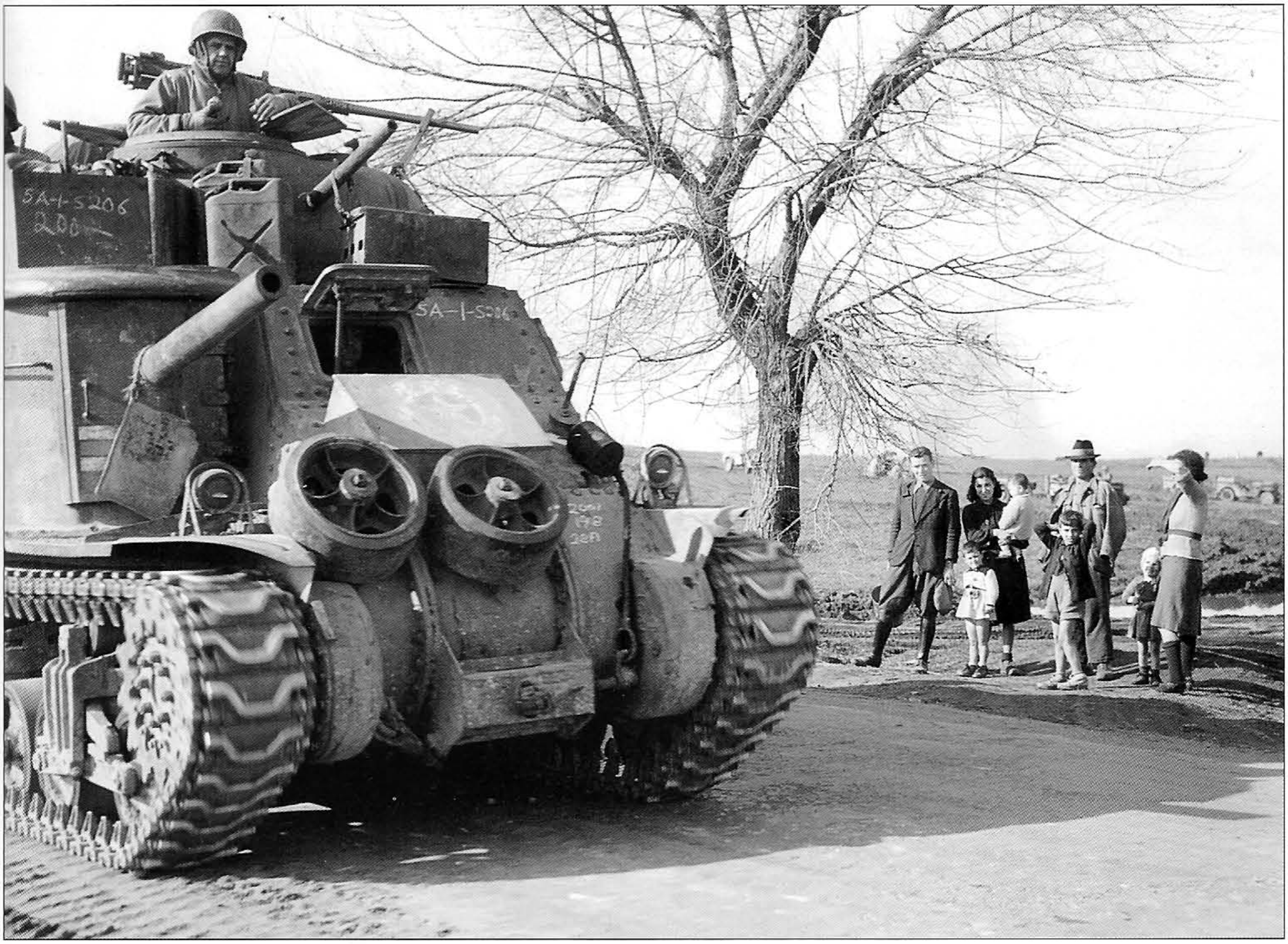
A M4A1 of the 756th Tank Battalion drives past a burned-out M4A2 in the ruins of Santa Maria Infante on 12 May 1944 during the drive to link up with the Anzio beach-head. This town had earlier been attacked by Commonwealth units to which the M4A2 presumably belonged as the US Army did not make use of the diesel powered M4A2.



Following Italy's withdrawal from the Axis after the Sicily campaign, the Wehrmacht impressed a number of Italian vehicles into service. This is a rear end view of a German Semovente M42 da 75/18, known in the Wehrmacht as StuG M42 850(i) which was abandoned in a hide-out in Castelforte on 18 May 1944 when the French CEF took the town. The insignia on the rear identifies as belonging to Pz.Jg.Abt.171 of the 71.Infanterie-Division which used a green ivy leaf insignia superimposed with two stylized horses' heads. It retains the Italian 1943 three-color camouflage.

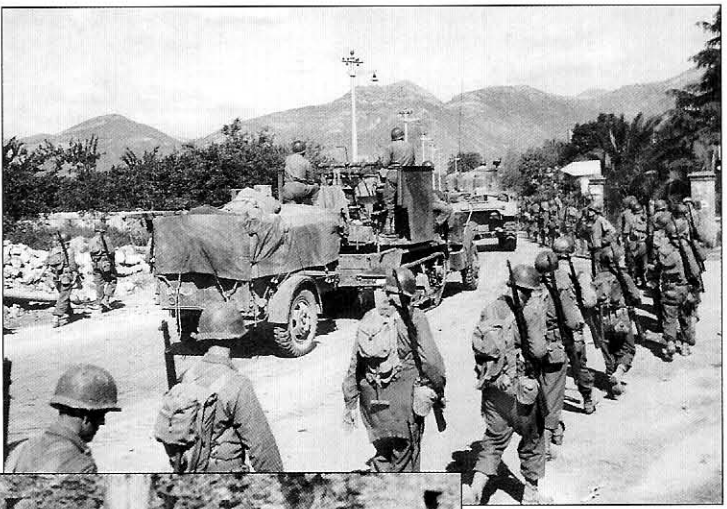


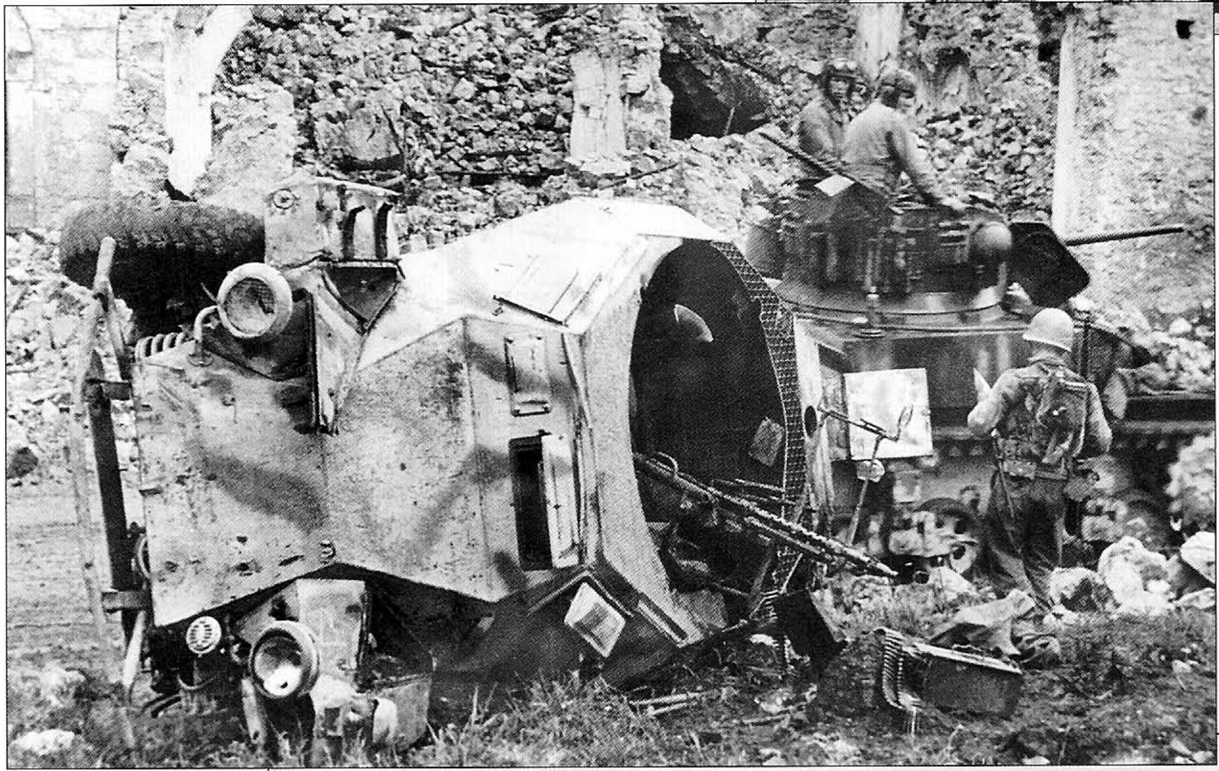
A M4A1 passes through Formia after the coastal town was taken by the 85th Division on 19 May 1944 during the assault towards Anzio. This is an early production M4A1 with the initial style of suspension bogie, but it has been rebuilt with appliqué armor.



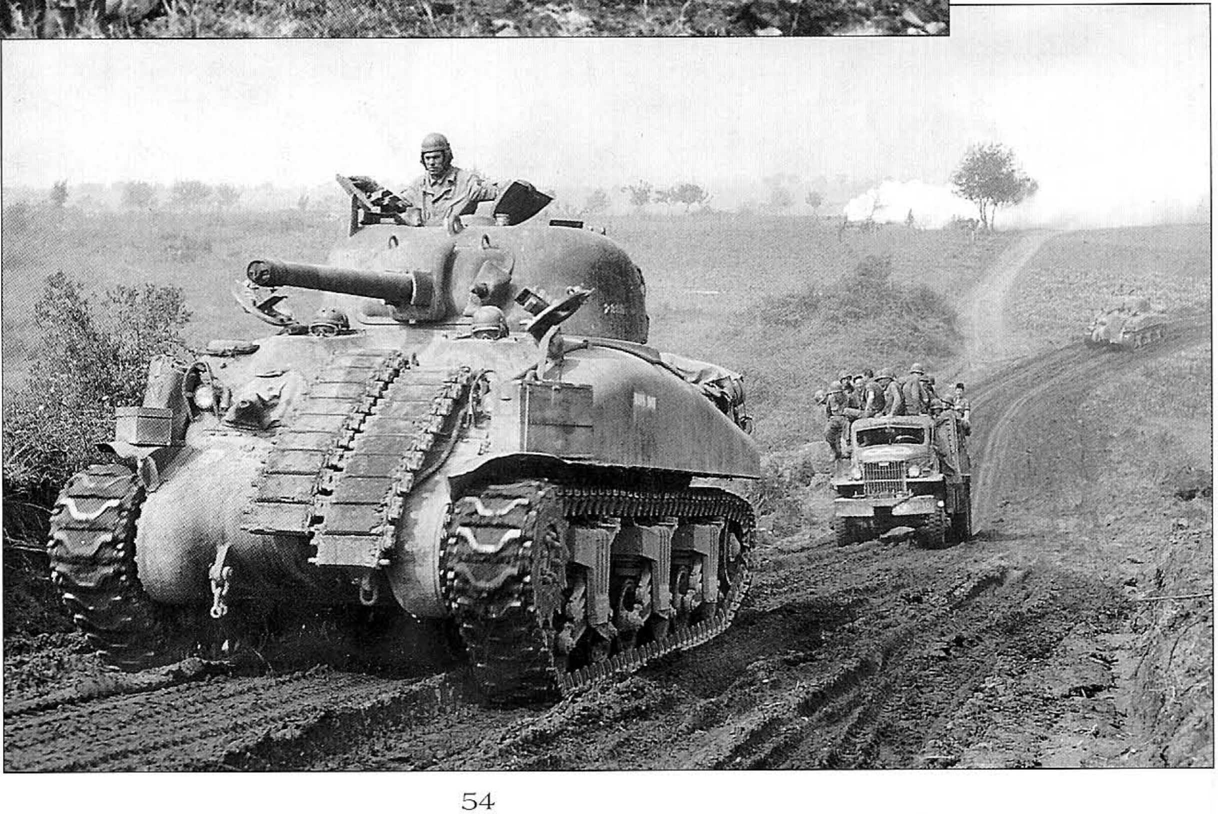
A T2 tank recovery vehicle passes a group of Italian civilians during the push out of the Anzio beach-head on 22 May 1944. The T2 has its unit identity code chalked on, but instead of the usual pattern it is using the encrypted ETOUSA unit serial number, in this case 5206. This serial number is also reflected in the three colored bar insignia on the front hull side.

A column of GIs move forward near Fondi during the Anzio breakout on 23 May 1944. On the road is a M15 multiple-gun motor carriage and ahead of it is a M4A1 tank.

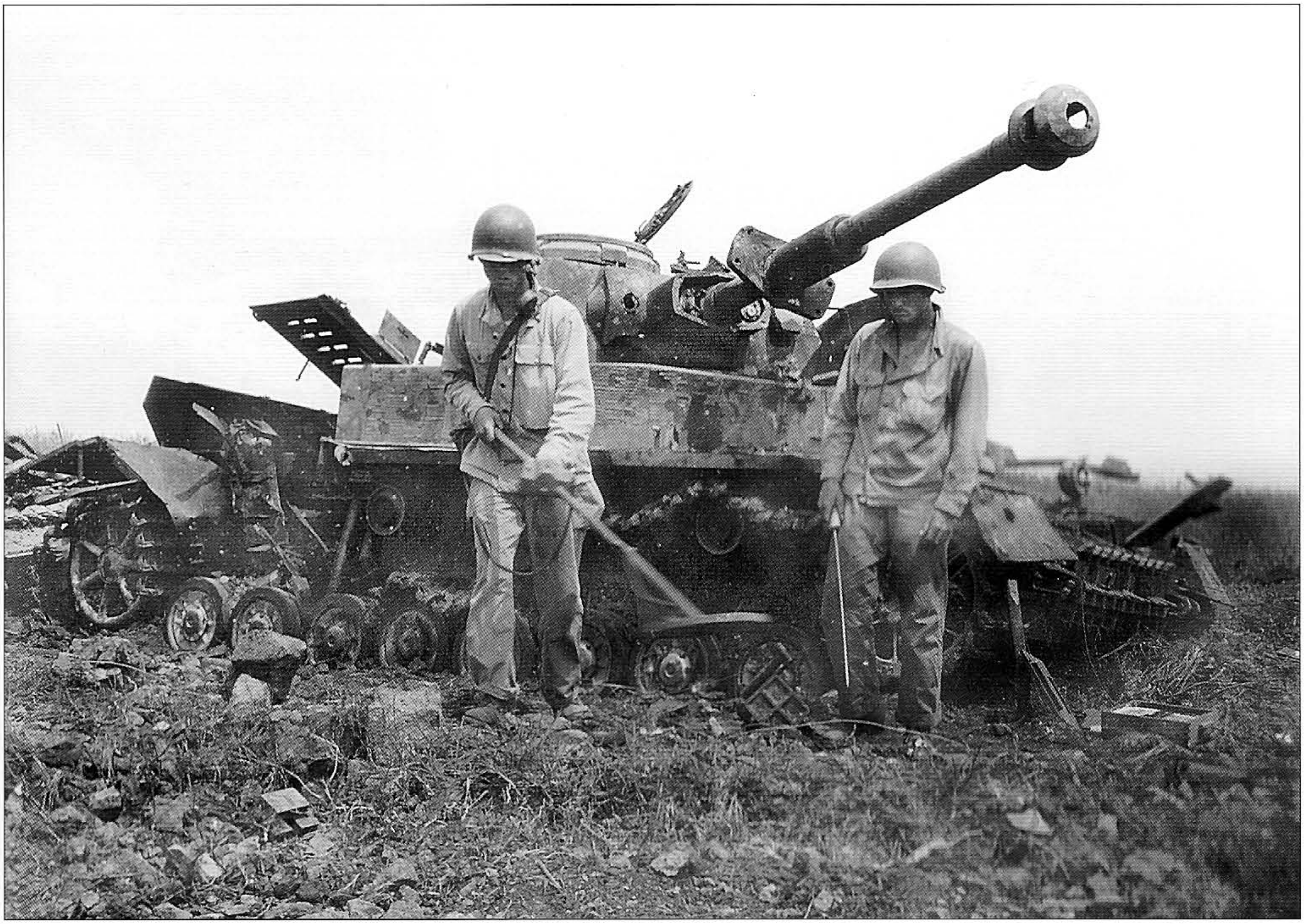




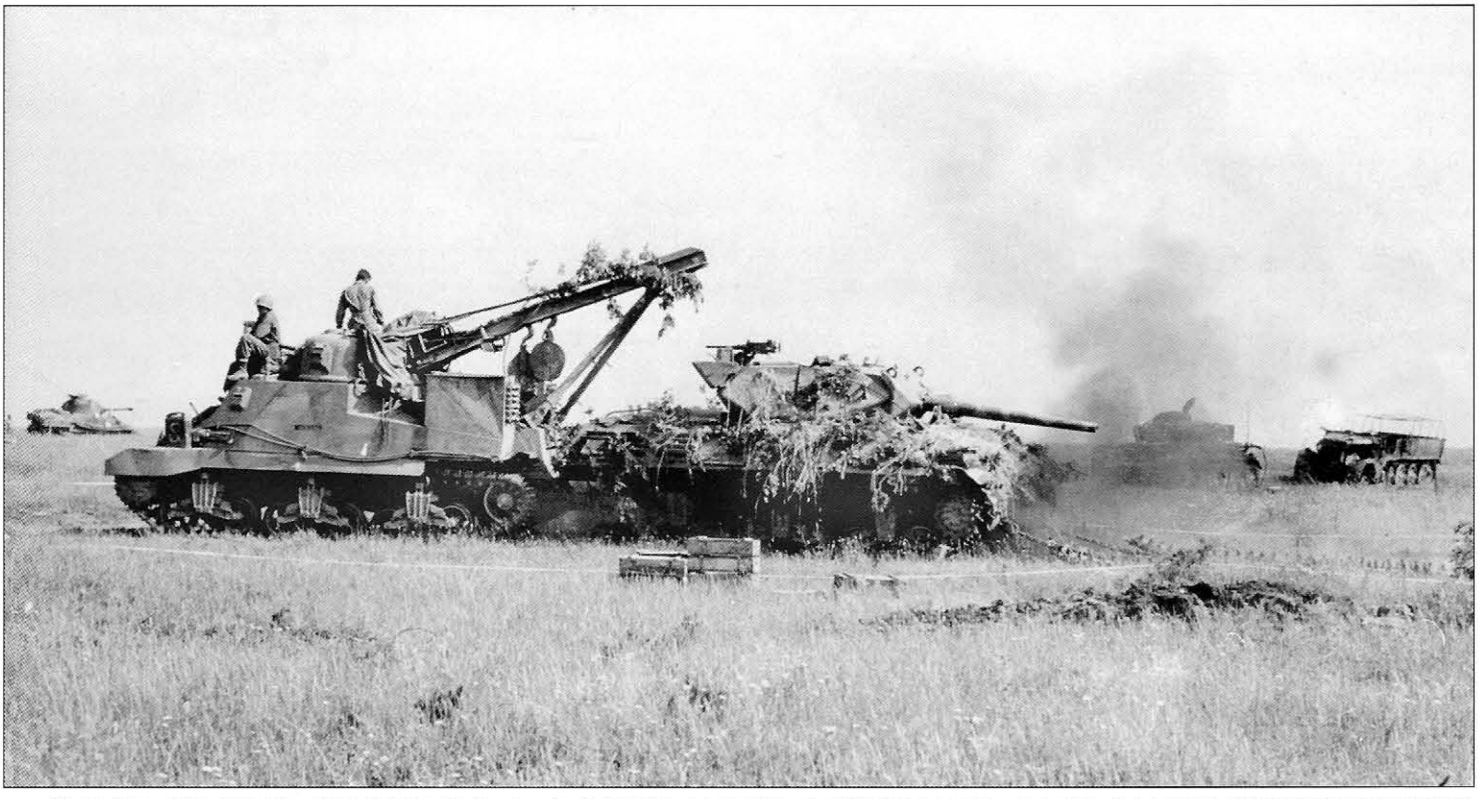
A M5 light tank passes the wreck of a German Sd.Kfz.222 light armored car, probably from the 90.Pz.Gren.Div. near Itri on 23 May 1944. The assault on Itri was part of the effort by the US II Corps to drive up from the Cassino front and link up with the Anzio beach-head.



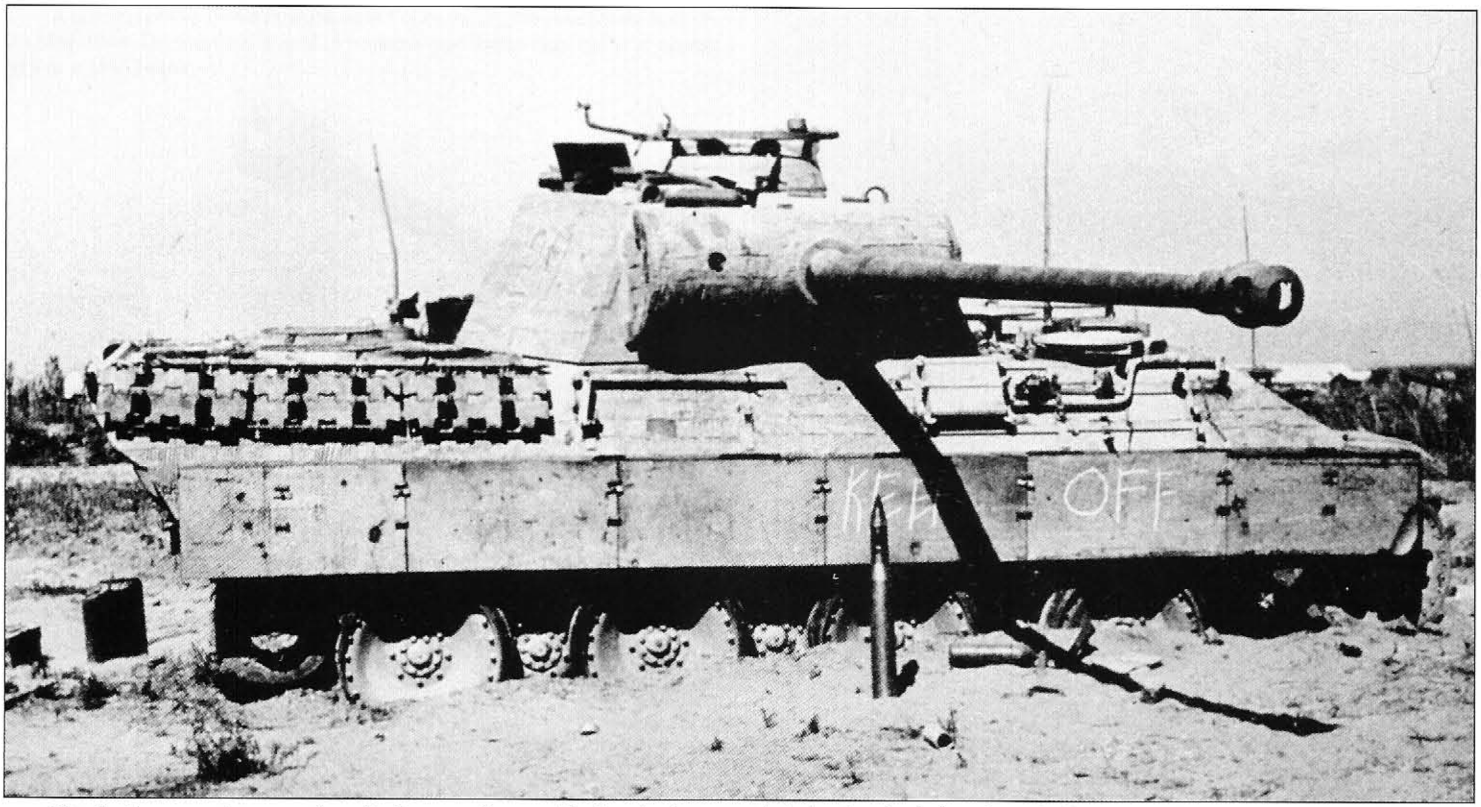
A M4A1 named "Miss Dot" leads a column on the roads leading away from Anzio on 23 May 1944.



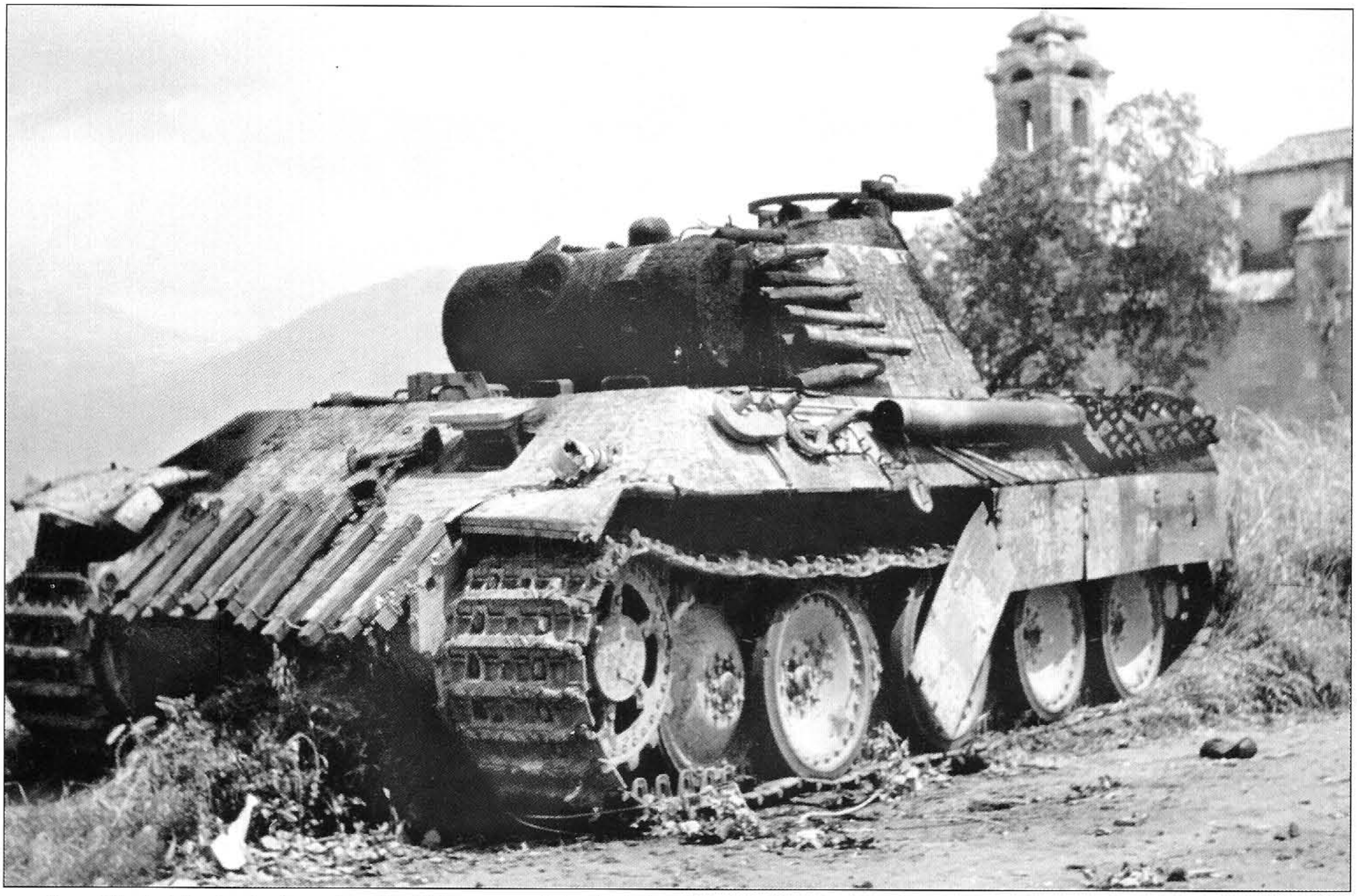
A team of engineers sweep for mines near the shattered wreck of a Pz.Kpfw.IV on 24 May 1944 after the start of the Anzio break-out operation.



Some idea of the intensity of the fighting during the Anzio break-out operation near Cisterna can be gauged by the amount of knocked out equipment in this photo. This M31 tank recovery vehicle recovers a knocked out M10 3-in GMC on 25 May 1944, while in the background are a M4A1, Pz.Kpfw.IV and German half-track.

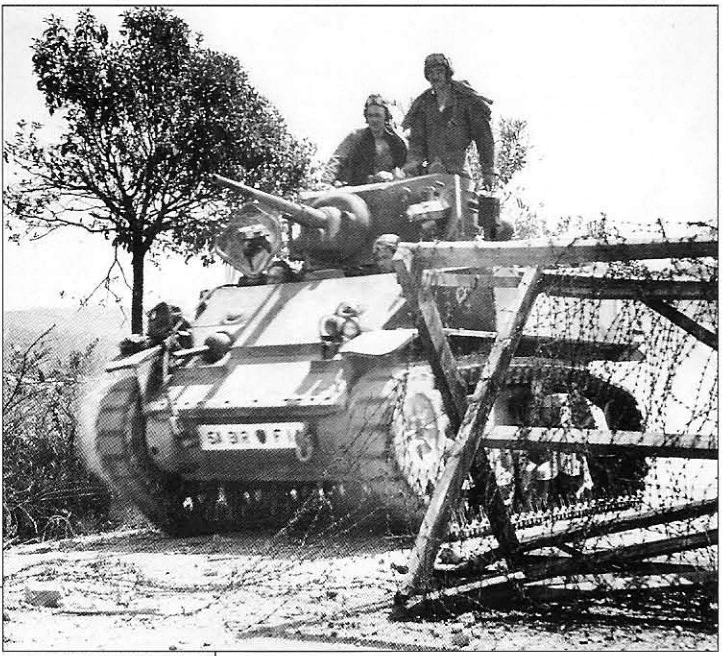


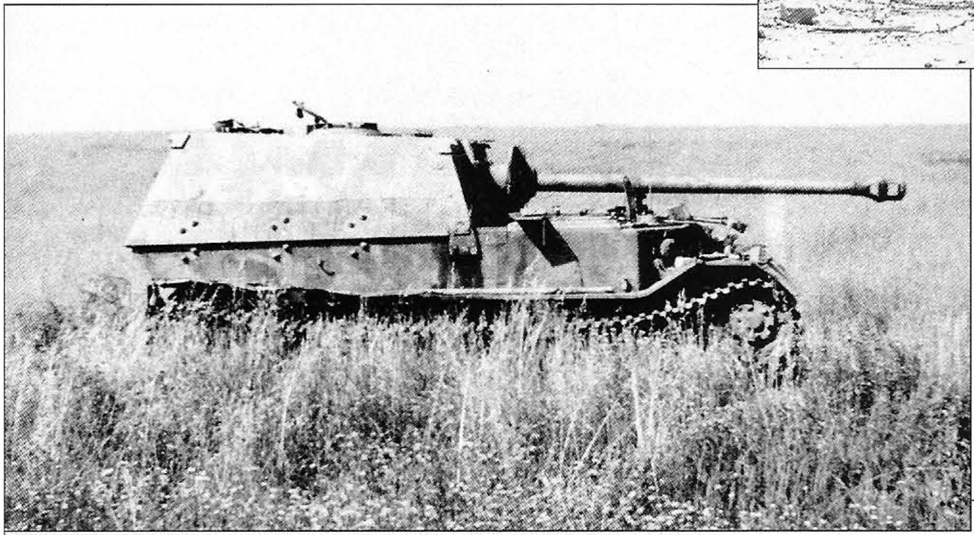
The first large scale encounter with the new German Panther tank occurred during the Anzio break-out in May 1944. Although a battalion of Panthers had been in action in the Anzio-Nettuno area since February, they had little contact with US forces until the May fighting. This is one of the I/Pz.Rgt.4 Panthers disabled during the fighting.



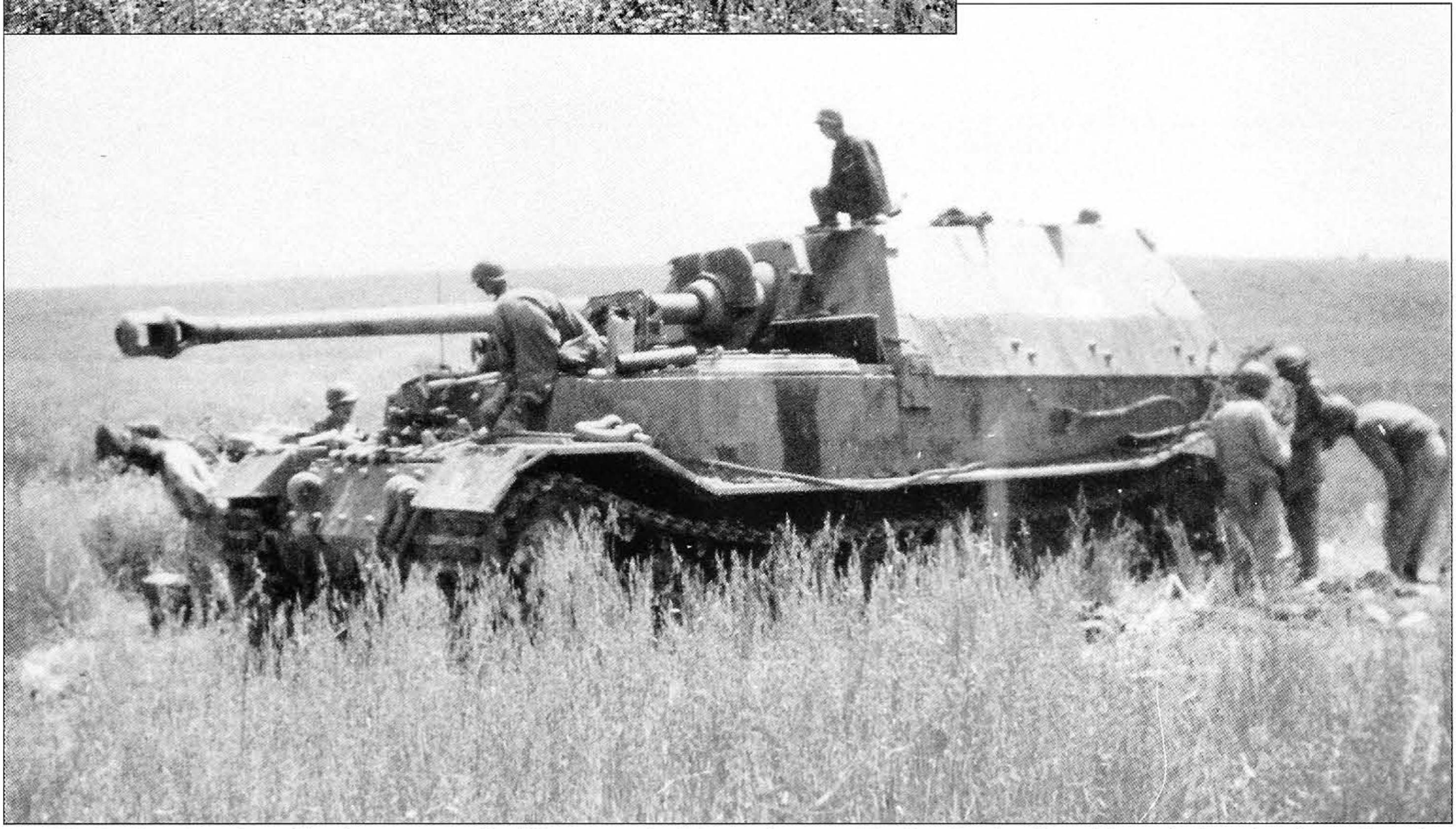
One of the first Panther tanks captured by US troops was this vehicle from I/Pz.Rgt.4 knocked out along Route 7 Appie in Tor Tre Ponti on 25 May 1944. It is Panther Ausf.A number "114". The corduroy mats draped on the vehicle were a common feature in this unit. They were made from timber lashed together with wire and were used to help extract tanks from muddy areas. The battalion lost more than half of its Panthers during the retreat from Anzio in May, many to mechanical breakdowns.

A M5 light tank of the 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Armored Division passes a "Spanish rider" barbed wire obstacle during the Anzio offensive on 29 May 1944. The battalion frequently painted their unit identity codes on the bow in a white rectangle, along with the battalion crest.

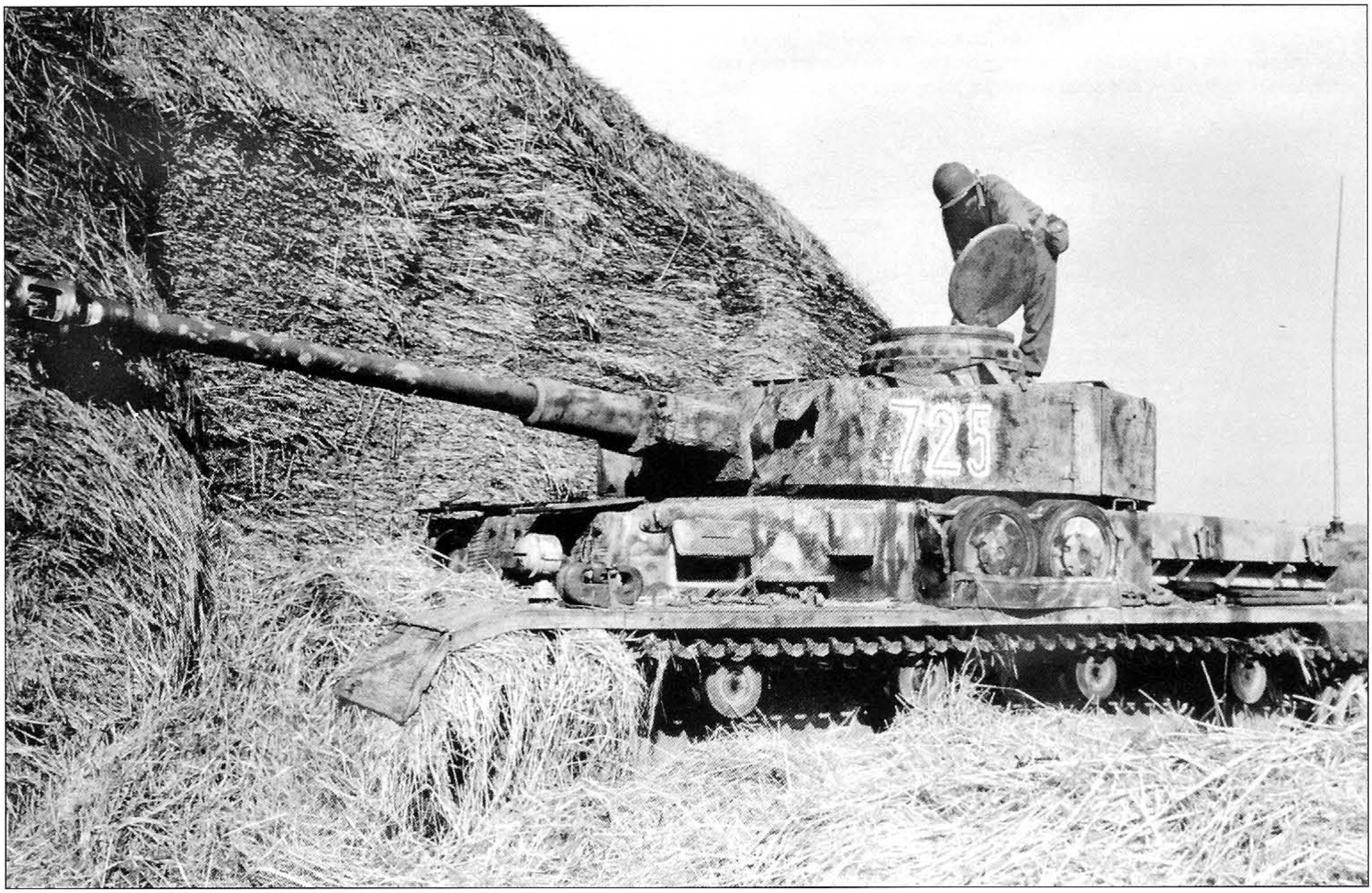




The 1/sPz.Jg.Abt.653 arrived in Italy in February 1944 and took part in the operations against the Anzio beach-head. This Ferdinand, numbered "102", was one of two abandoned due to mechanical problems during the retreat in late May 1944. (MHI)

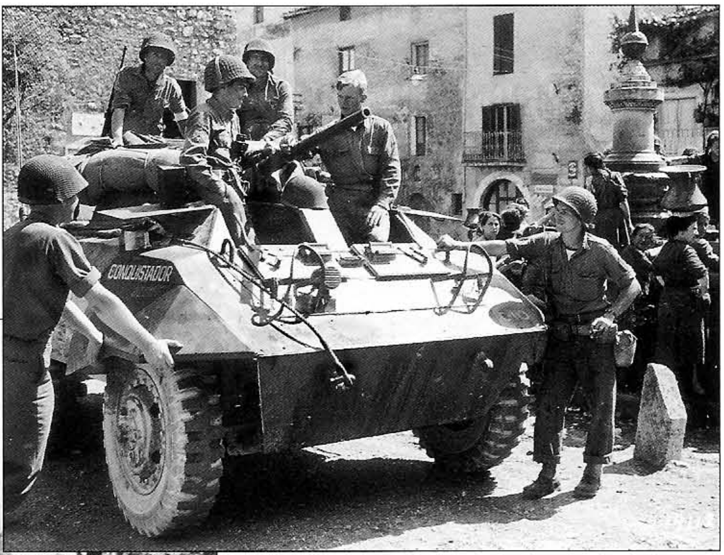


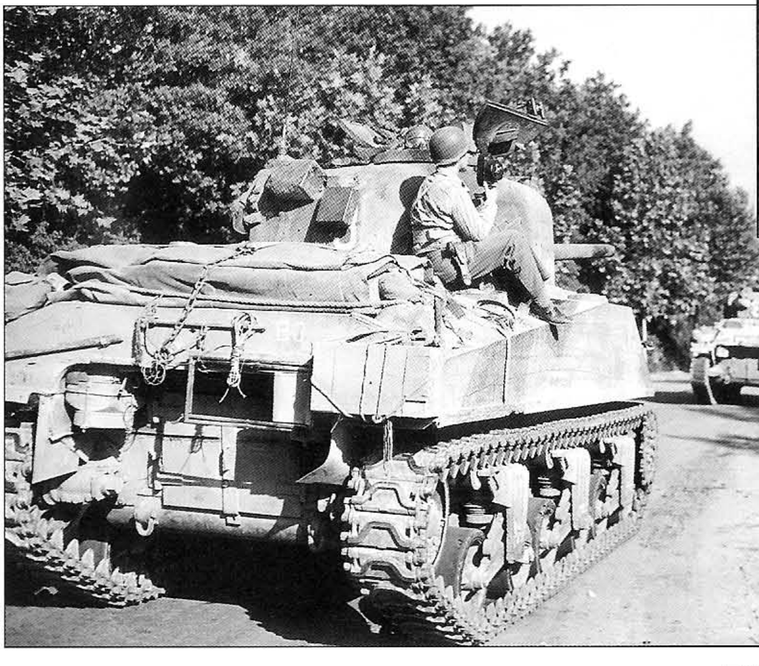
This Ferdinand, numbered "102", was captured by US troops and subsequently sent to Aberdeen Proving Ground for evaluation where it remains today. (MHI)



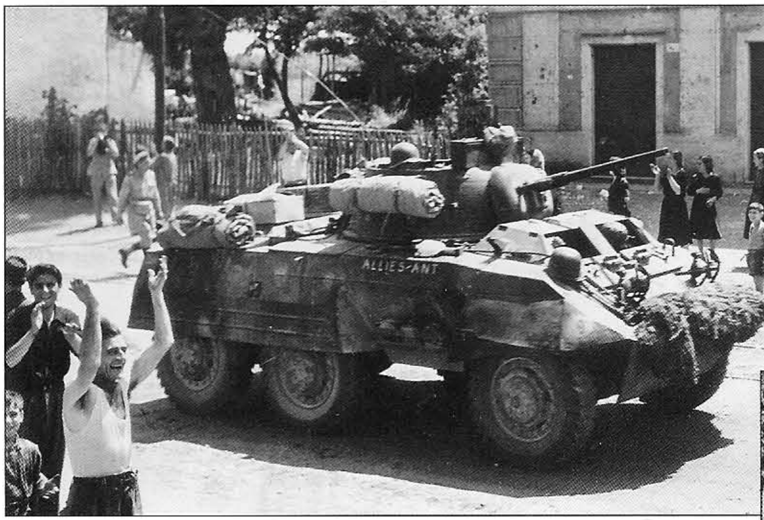
A GI looks over a knocked out Pz.Kpfw.IV Ausf.H from the 26.Panzer-Division near a hay-stack in Sezze on 29 May 1944.

The crew of an M8 light armored car "Conquistador" of Company C, 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Armored Division, in Norma, Italy, following the breakout from the Anzio beach-head on 30 May 1944. This unit was redesignated as the 81st CRSM when the 1st Armored Division adopted the "light" 1943 table of organization in 1944.



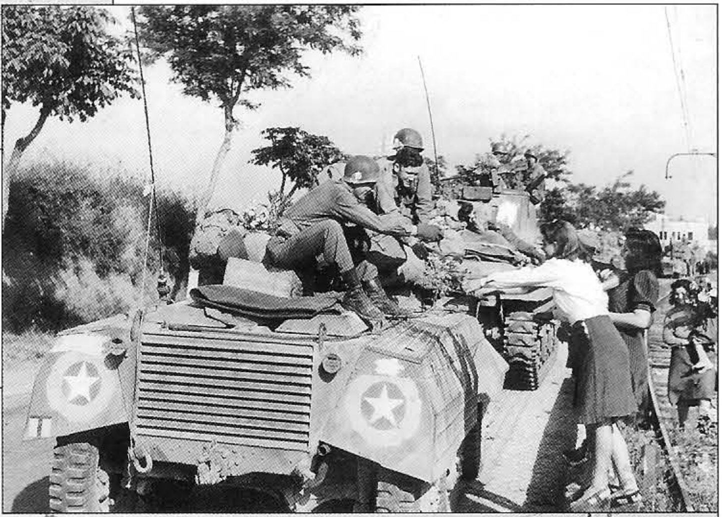


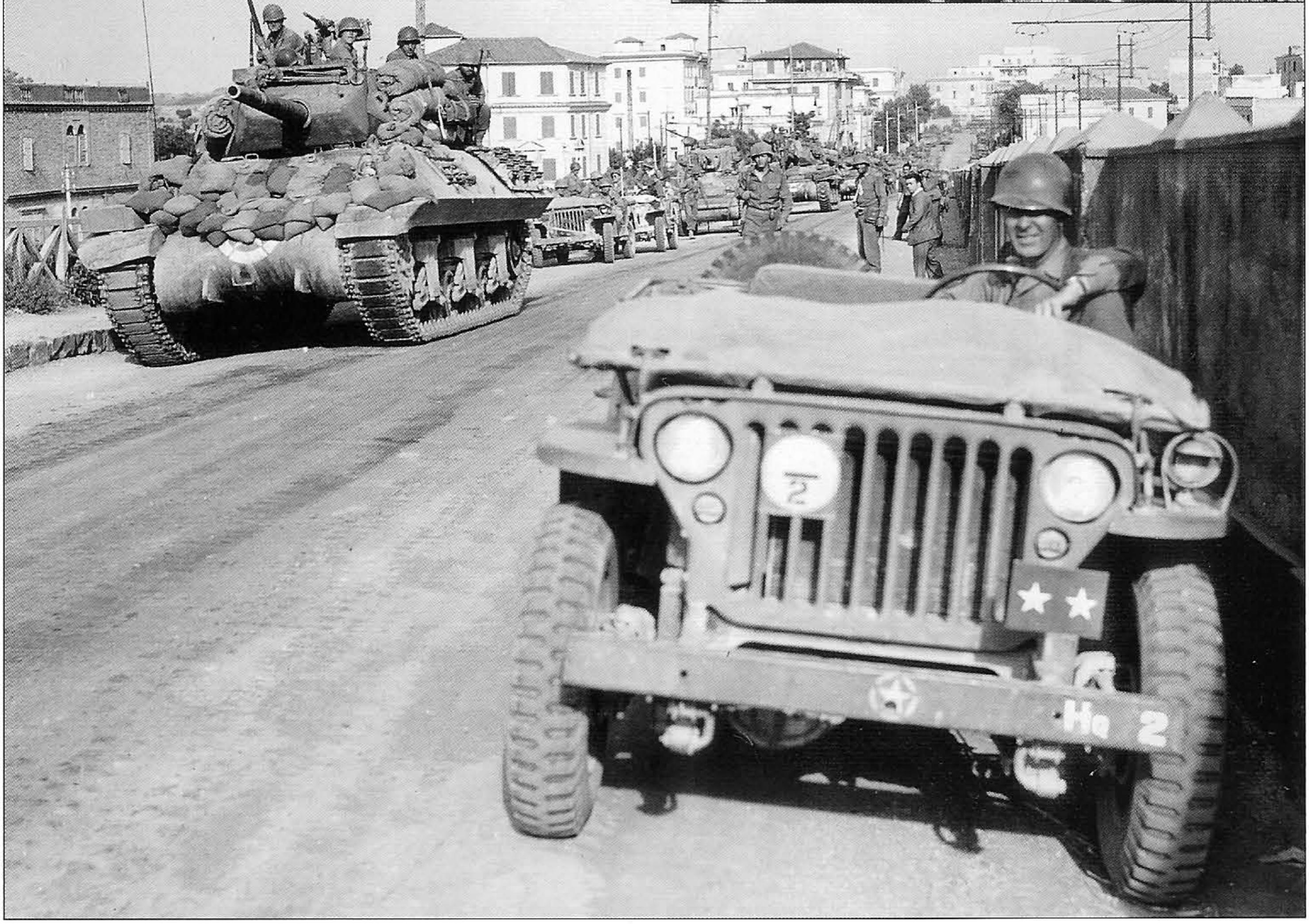
A M4 tank carrying a Signal Corps cameraman nears Rome in early June 1944. Careful inspection of the hull rear shows the remnants of the fittings for the deep fording stacks which have mostly been removed to permit access to the engine for repair.



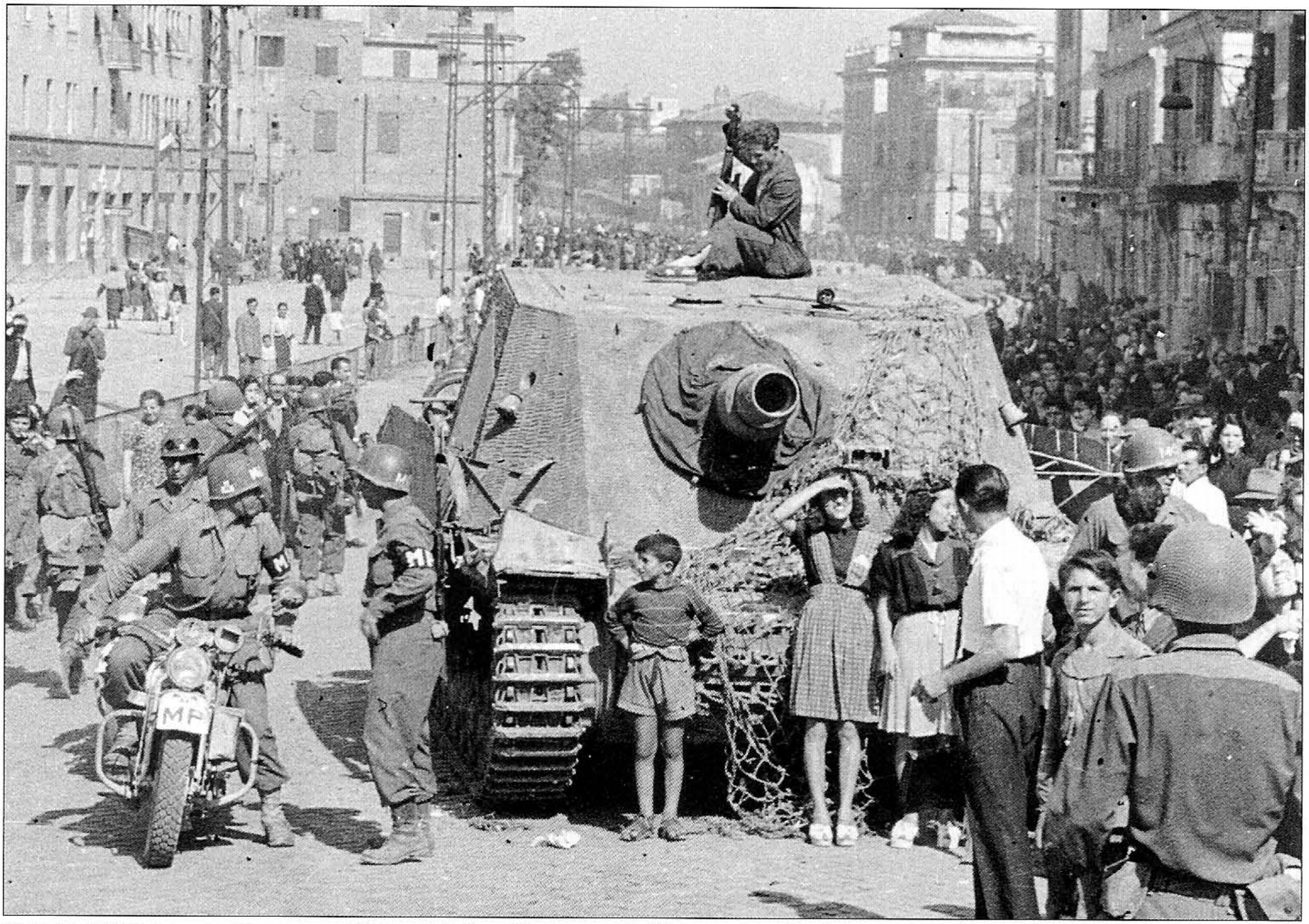
A M8 light armored car named "Allies Ant" enters the outskirts of Rome in June 1944. Typical of this period of the fighting, it lacks a turret machine mount.

A column supporting the 3rd Infantry Division enters Rome in June 1944. The M8 light armored car carries the typical white allied star with yellow surround, but the censor has painted over the unit markings.

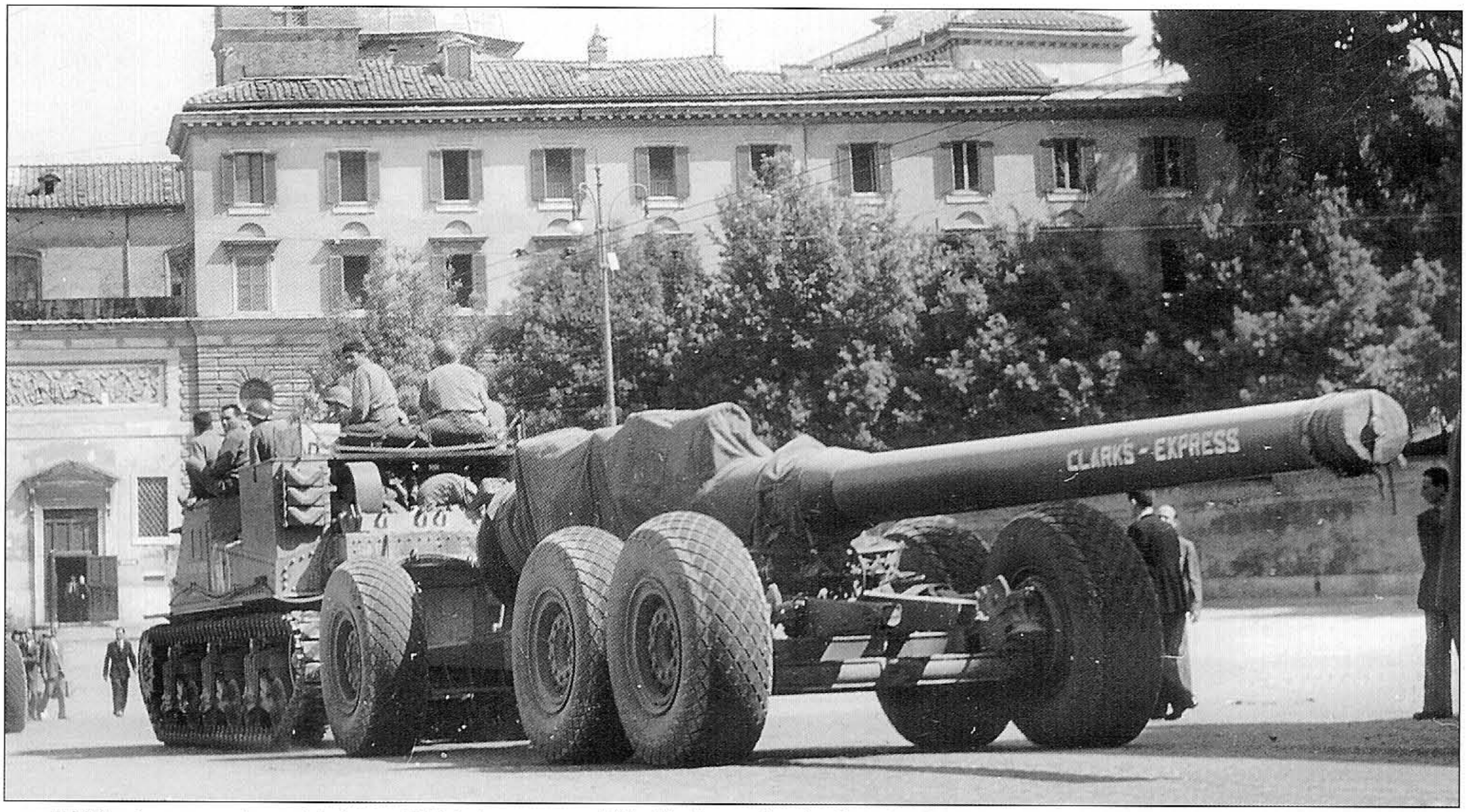




An armored column enter Rome on 4 June 1944, led by a M10 3-in. GMC. The jeep in the foreground carries the identity plate of a major general and so is that of one of the divisional commanders. Unfortunately, no divisional insignia is painted on the bumper.

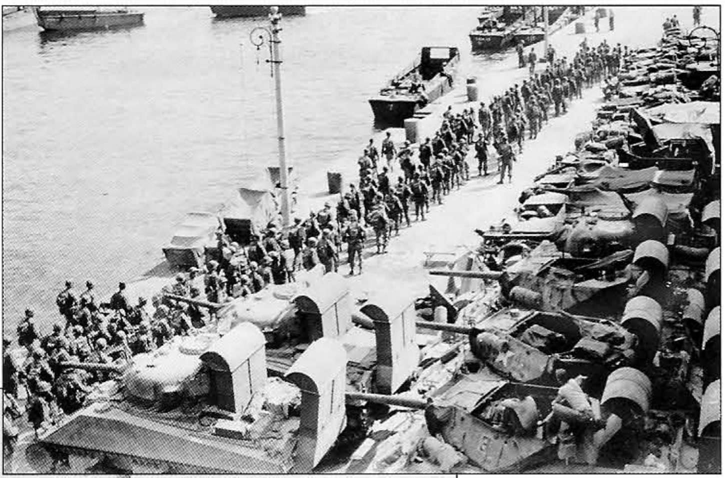


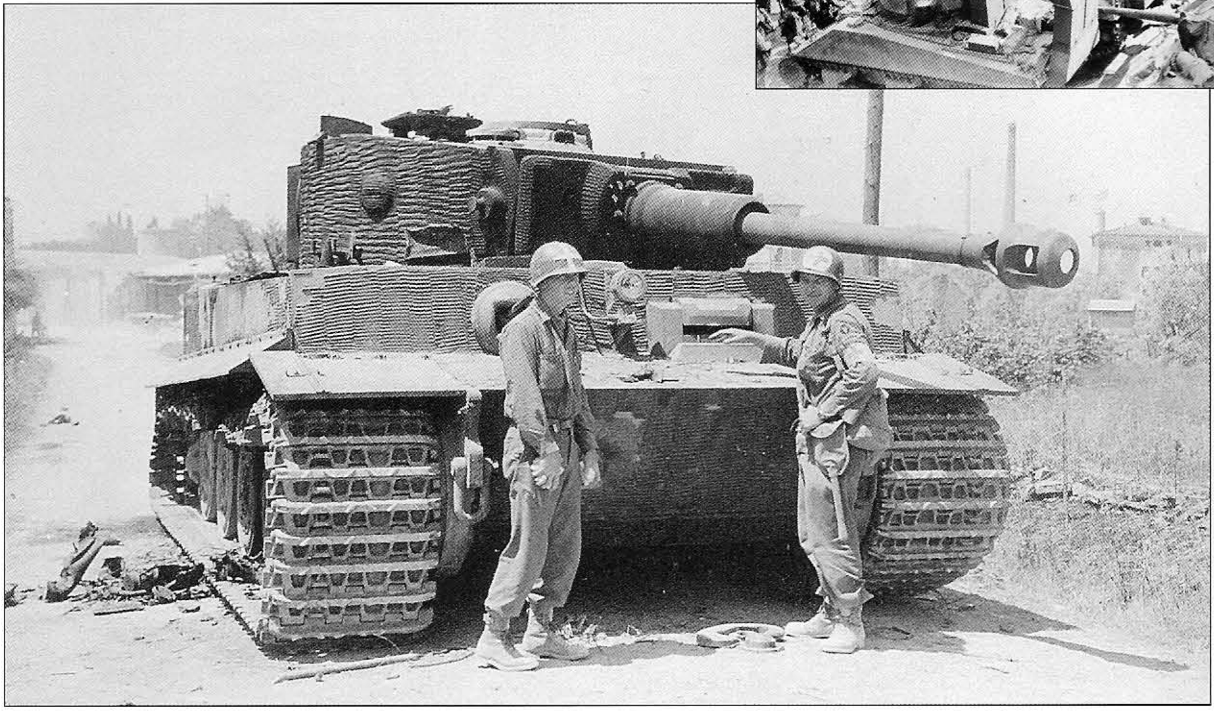
Civilians and GIs inspect a Sturmpanzer IV Brummbär from Sturmpanzer Abt.216 abandoned in Rome.



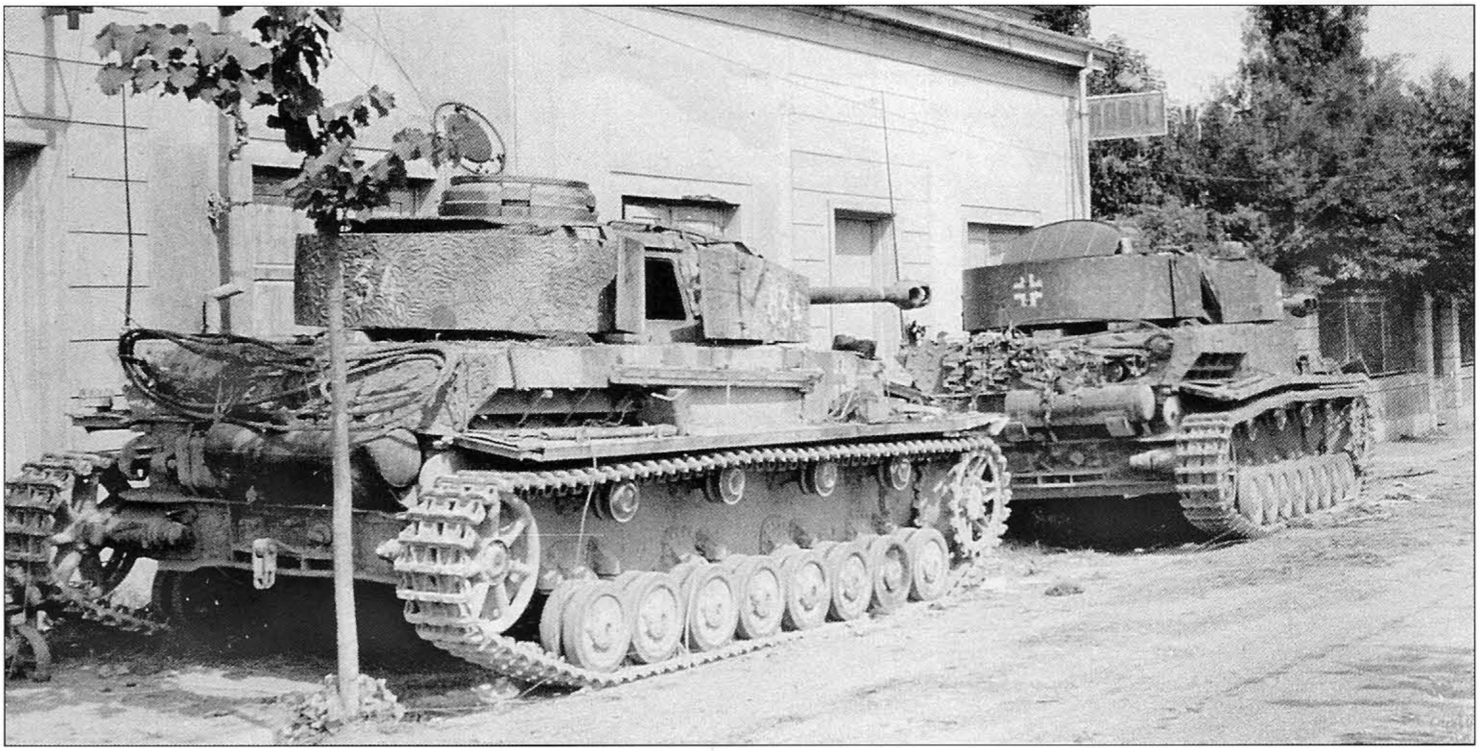
A M33 prime mover is used to tow a M1 8 inch gun named "Clark's Express" to the front through the streets of Rome on 5 June 1944. Due to the size of this weapon, the barrel and recoil assembly were towed separately from the carriage. The M33 was based on the M3 medium tank, minus its usual turret and hull mounted 75mm gun.

The Italian theater saw a major diversion of its forces in mid-summer of 1944 when the Seventh Army prepared to embark for the invasion of southern France. This shows a pair of M4 tanks and M10 3-in. GMC along a dock in southern Italy prior to boarding ships on 31 July 1944. The deep wading trunks are the locally manufactured 5AITC type which were peculiar to the Italian theater with a noticeable center stiffener on the stacks.

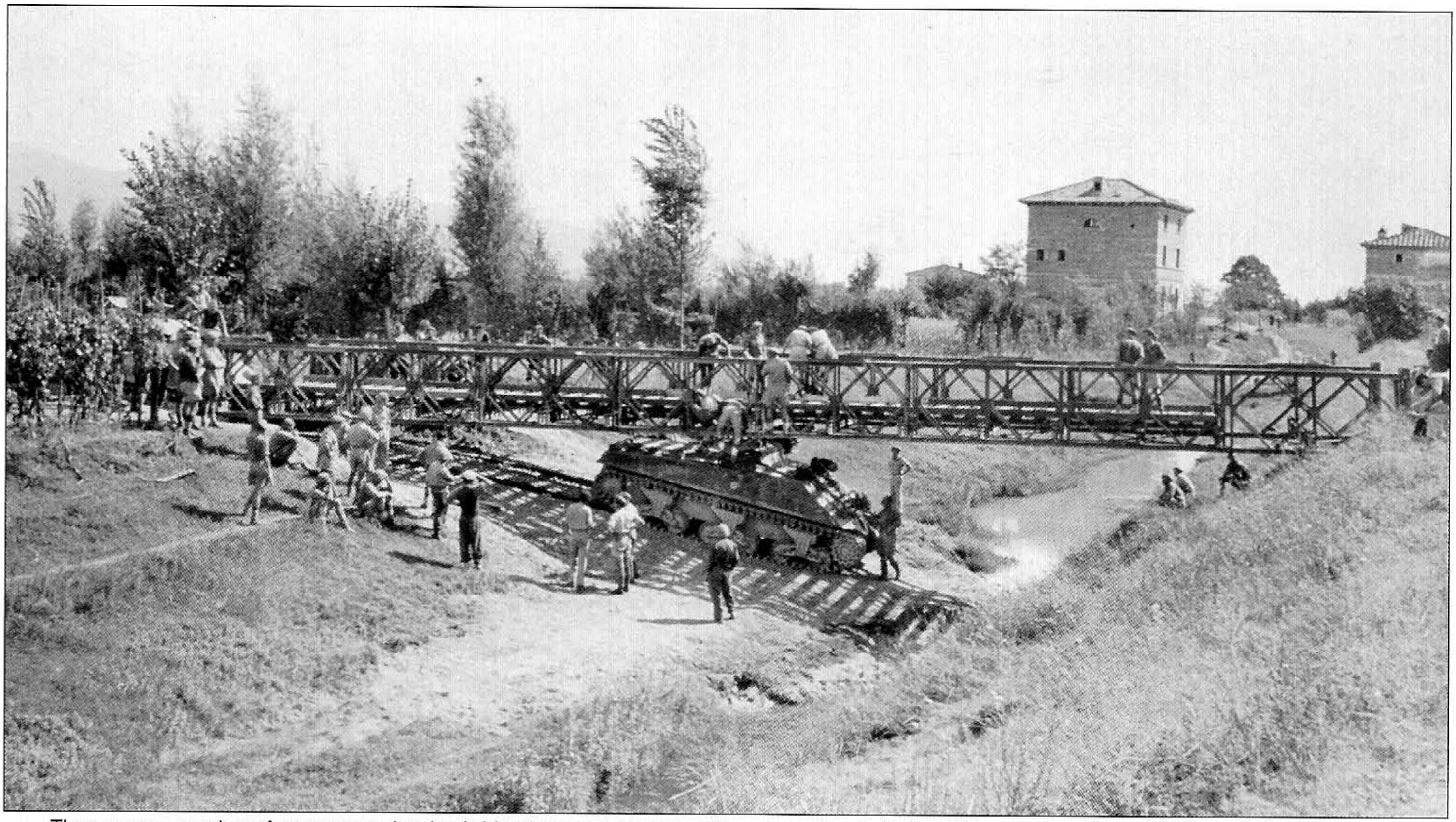




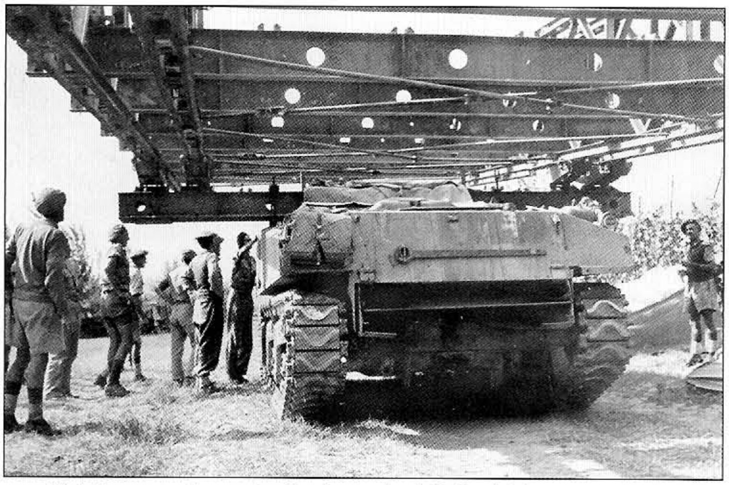
Two medics pose in front of a Tiger I number "221" of platoon leader Lt. Wilhem Keitel from 2/s.Pz.Abt.504 that was knocked out in a close range duel with the M4A1 tank of Lt. Edwin Cox of the 752nd Tank Battalion in Cecina on 1 July 1944. The M4A1 hit the Tiger on the right sponson with an armor piercing round, setting the fuel tank on fire. Cox later received the Silver Star for the engagement.



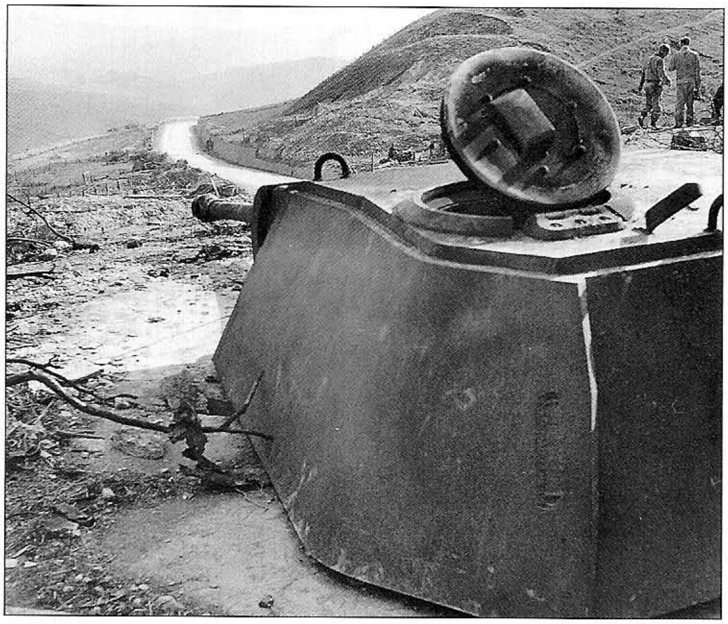
A pair of Pz.Kpfw.IV of the 26.Panzer-Division lie abandoned on the Ponsacco-Pontedera road on 18 July 1944. The tank in the rear, number "834" is an early production Ausf.H, while the other is an Ausf.J.



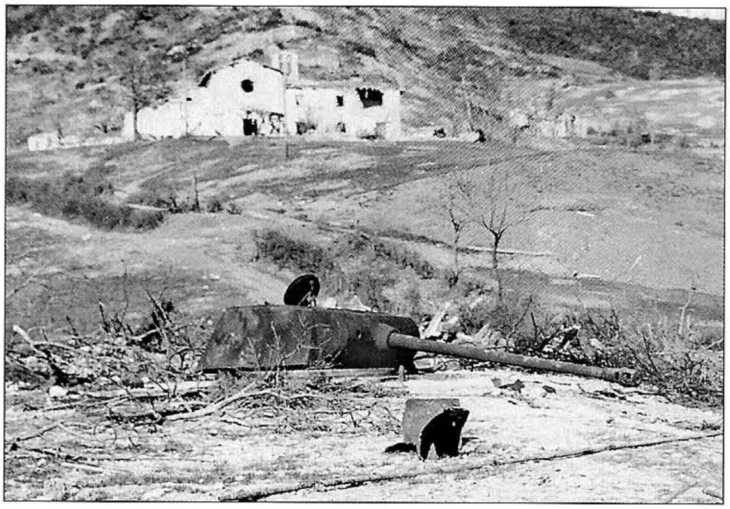
There were a number of attempts to develop bridge-layers to overcome German anti-tank ditches. This experiment consisted of a Bailey bridge mounted on top a Sherman. Here is being displayed to Allied officers near Pistoia on 26 September 1944.



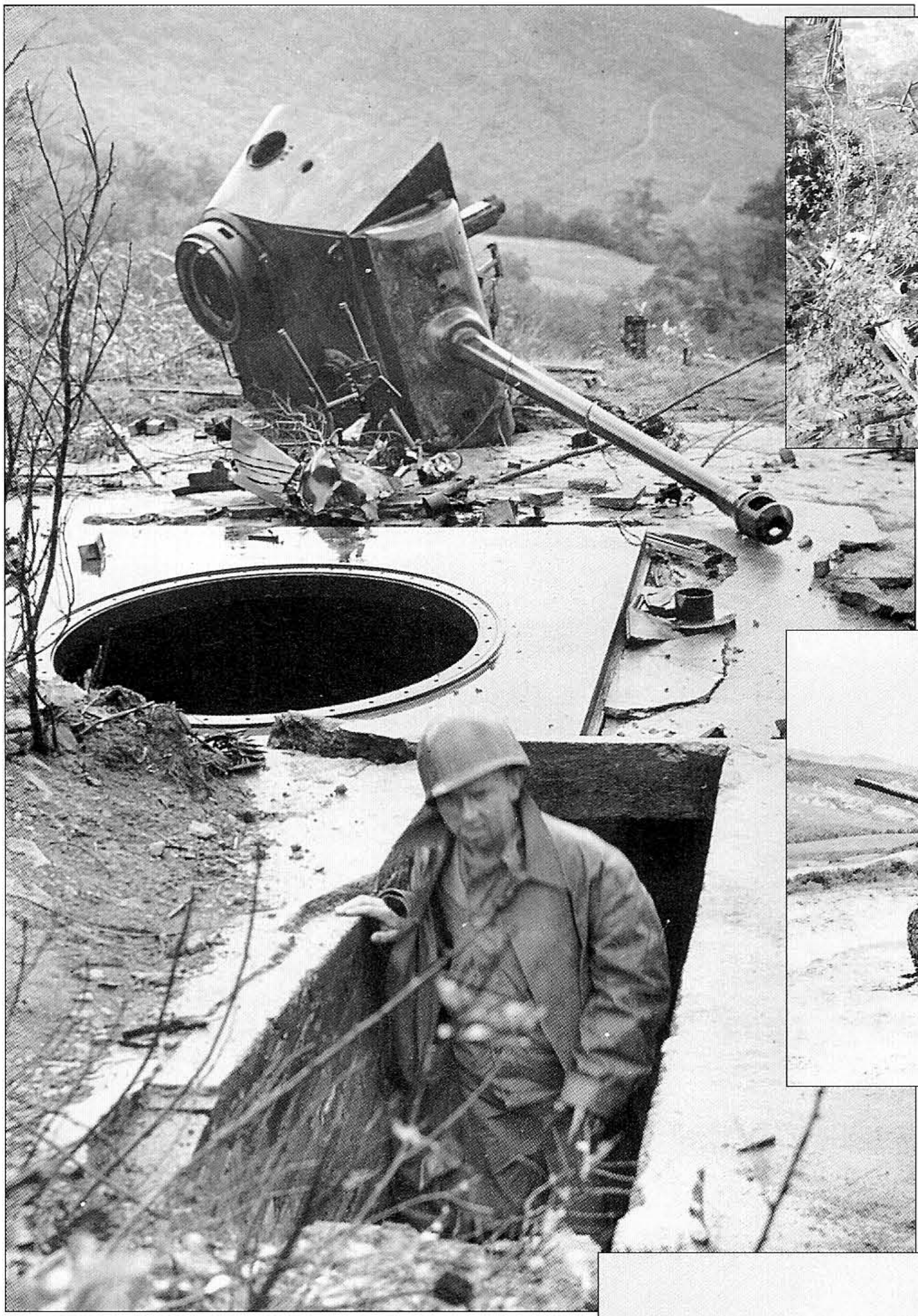
This is a rear view under the improvised Bailey bridge carrier during the Pistoia display in 1944.

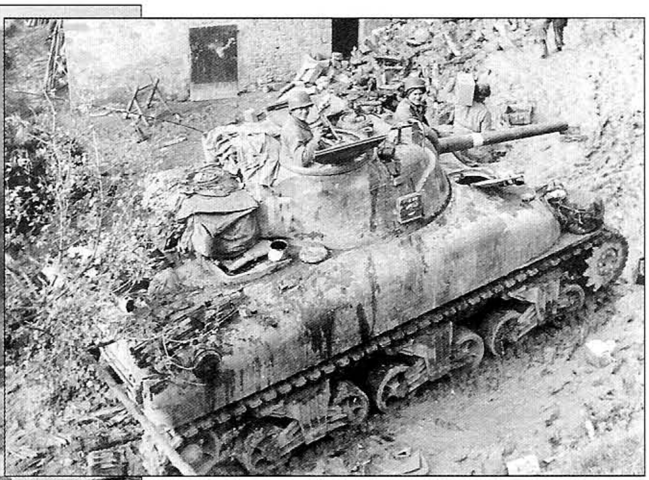


A Panther Ostwallturm lays abandoned in Santa Lucia after US forces captured Futa pass on 29 September 1944, part of the German Gothic Line defense. While some of these bunkers used actual Panther tank turrets, others like this one used a specially manufactured turret derived from the Panther which differed in a number of details such as the thicker roof armor and the use of a simpler turret hatch without the vision cupola. These Panther turrets were deployed either on a concrete Pantherturm III bunker as here, or on a pre-fabricated steel Pantherturm I casemate/bunker.

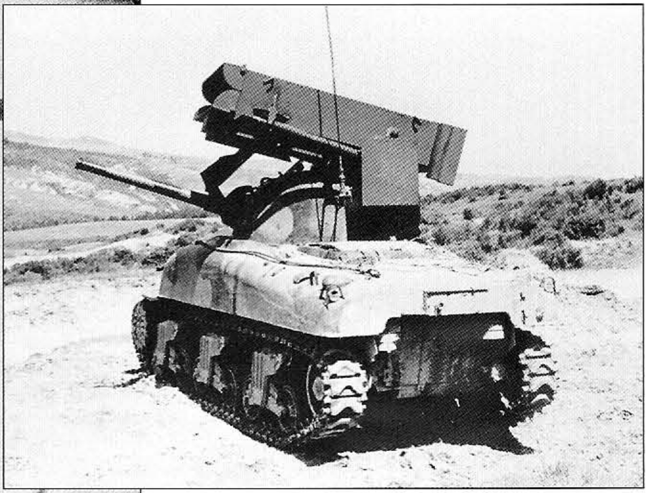


This is another view of the same Panther Ostwallturm along the Gothic line covering Futa pass. This particular example was positioned near Santa Lucia. A total of 18 Pantherturm I and 30 Pantherturm III were deployed in Italy, mostly along the Gothic Line.



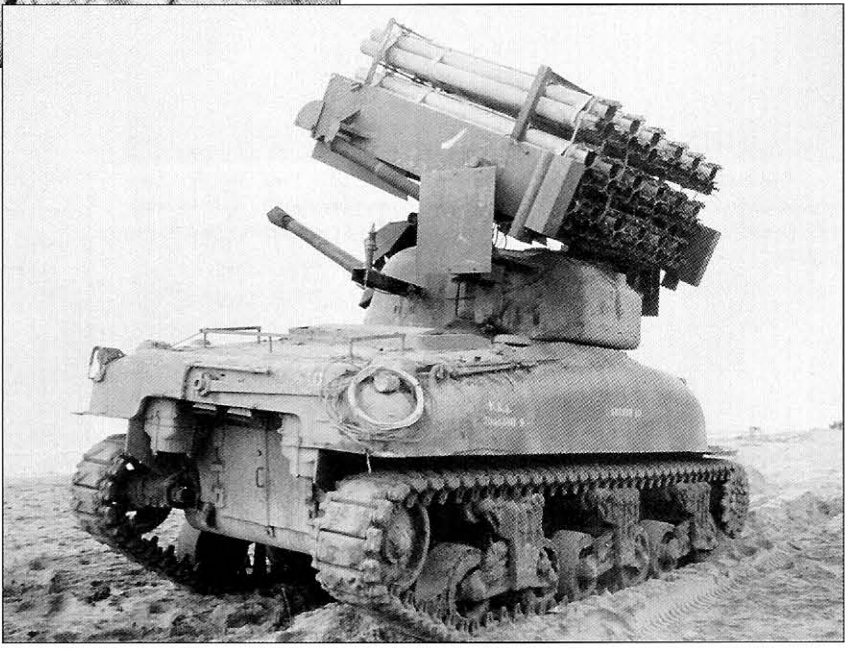


A M4A1 of the 1st Armored Division passes through Palazzo during the November fighting. This tank has a few local modifications including a first aid box attached to the turret side and a donkey sight in front of the commander's cupola for indirect artillery fire.

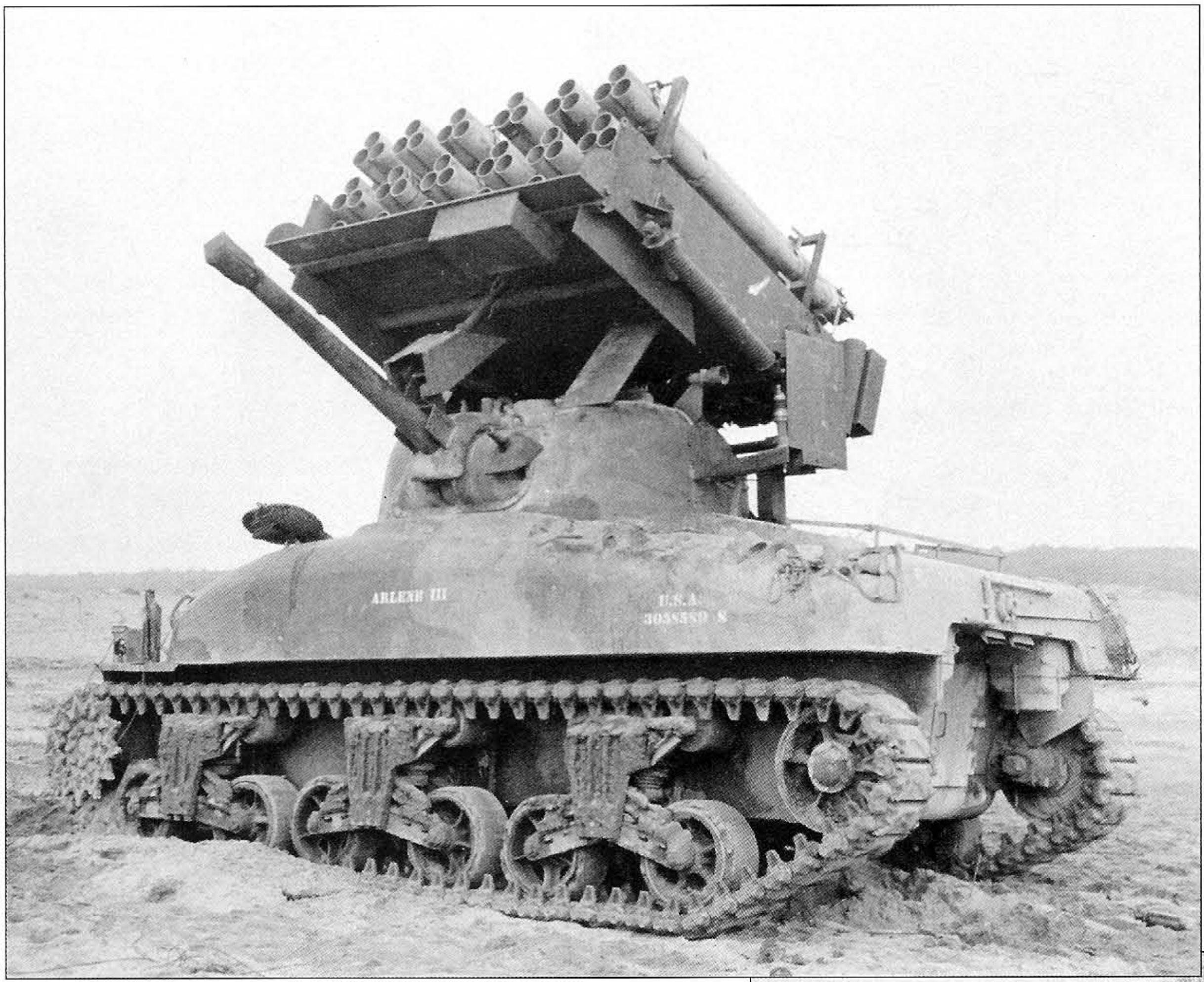


The 7.2 inch M17 "Whiz-Bang" multiple rocket launcher was used in Italy in 1944. These fired 20 7.2 T37 rockets. This is one belonging to the 752nd Tank Battalion and is seen here during test firings on 12 August 1944.

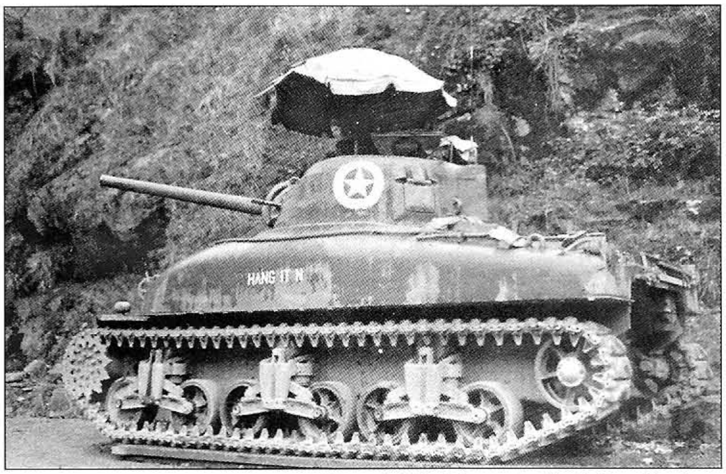
A Pantherturm I (Stahluntersatz) knocked out south of Collina pass during the fighting along the Gothic Line in September 1944. This particular example uses the turret from a Panther Ausf.D tank.



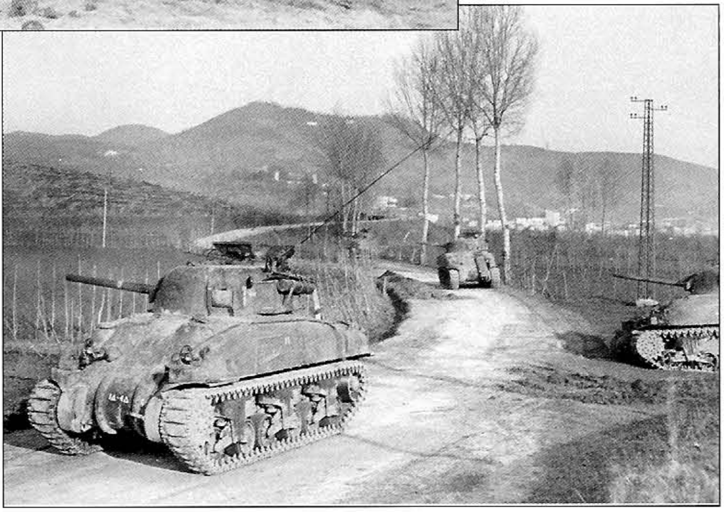
There were a number of expedient conversions of the M4 tank in Italy. This M4A1 of Co. A, 760th Tank Battalion was fitted with an improvised 54 tube rocket launcher created using M14 three-round 4.5 inch rocket launchers intended for fighter aircraft, and mounted in a modified M17 rocket launcher frame. It is seen here near Viareggio, Italy on 15 December 1944.



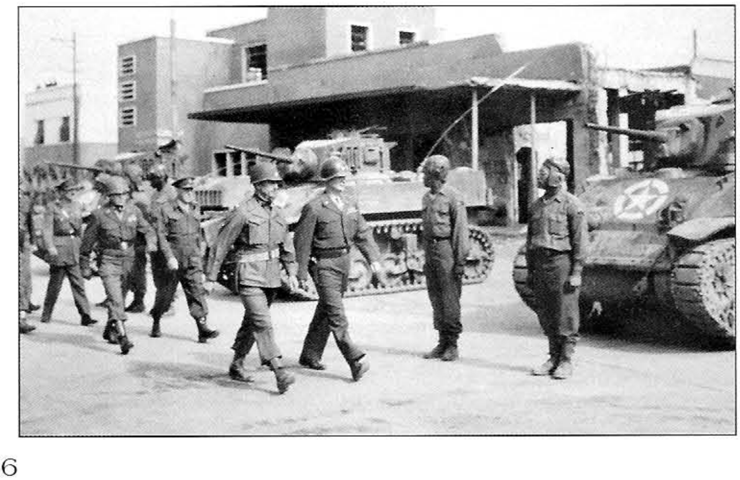
Another view of "Arlene III" from the 760th Tank Battalion after fitted with an improvised rocket launcher based on the M17 Whiz-Bang launcher. This was mounted on the tank in late November when the battalion had been pulled out of the line for refitting.



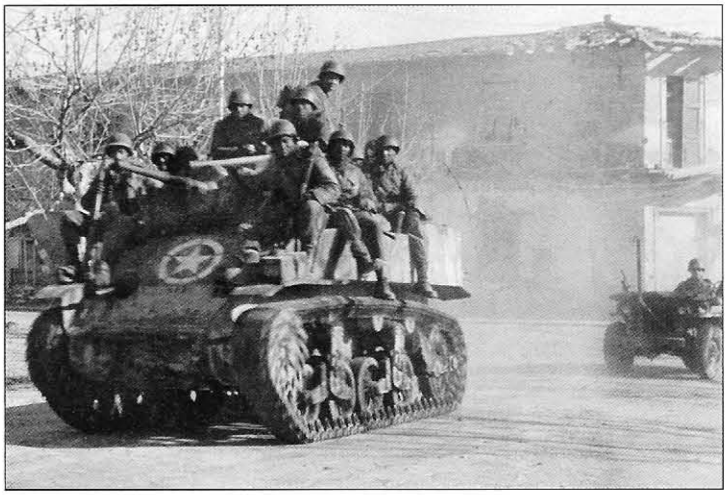
The crew of a M4A1 named "Hang It N" of the 751st Tank Battalion has a large civilian umbrella rigged over the turret during operations near Porette on 6 December 1944. This is an early production M4A1 with the early pattern bogies.



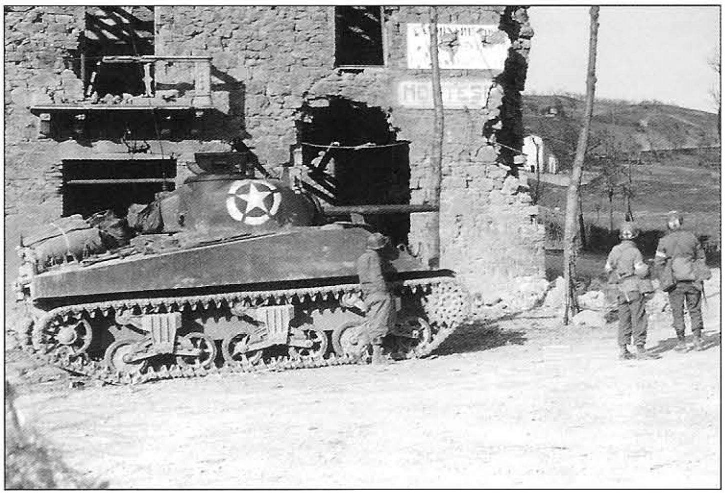
A group of M4A1 tanks of Co. C, 4th Tank Battalion, 1st Armored Division near Filettole on 10 January 1945.



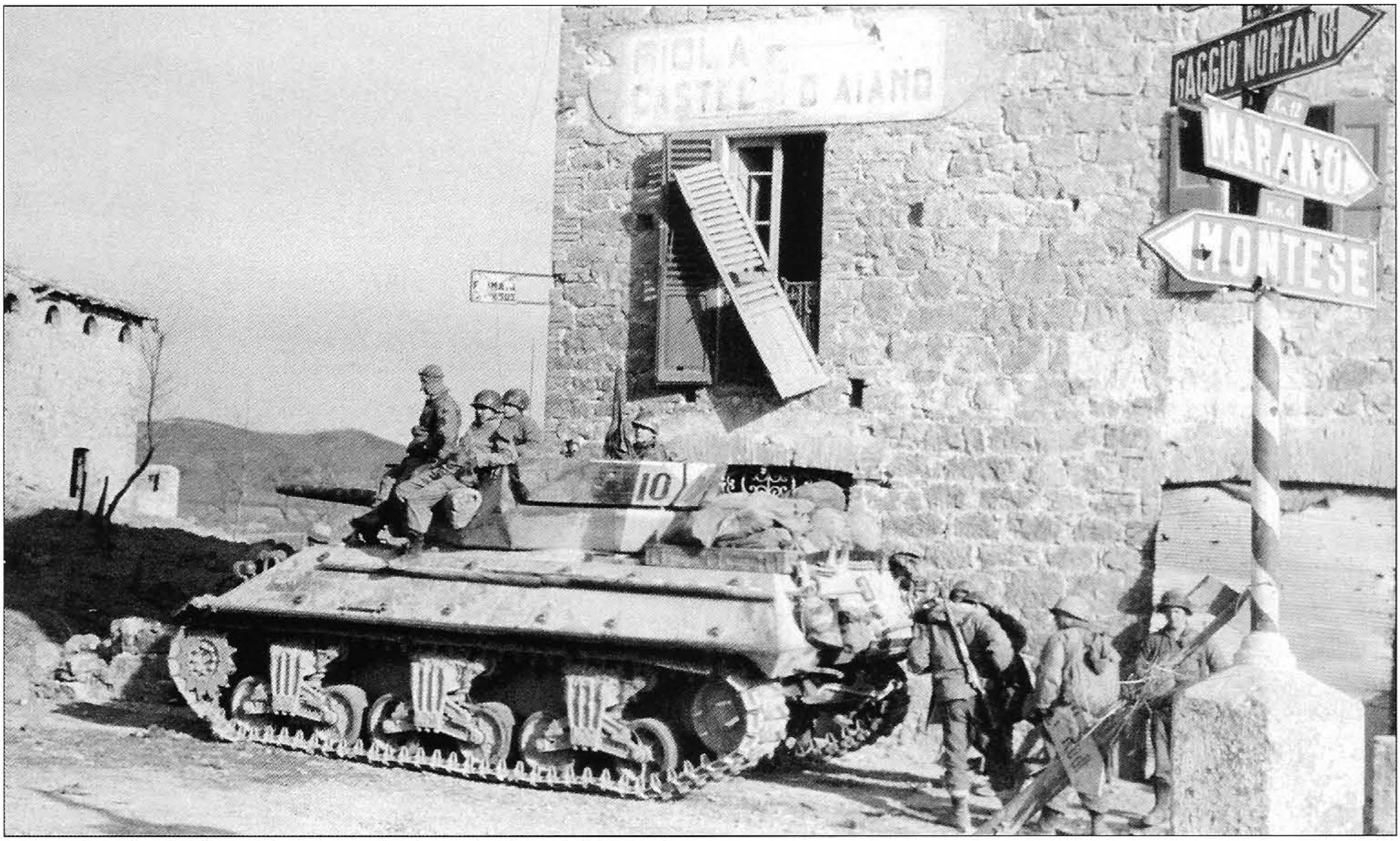
Lt. Gen Willis Crittenberger, commander of IV Corps, reviews the tankers of the 758th Light Tank Battalion. This battalion was the only segregated African American tank battalion in the Italian campaign, and also the only one which based on the light tank battalion organization, using M5 light tanks instead of a mixture of medium and light tank battalions. The battalion was deployed in Italy in November 1944 and usually fought alongside the 92nd Division, the other African-American unit in Italy.



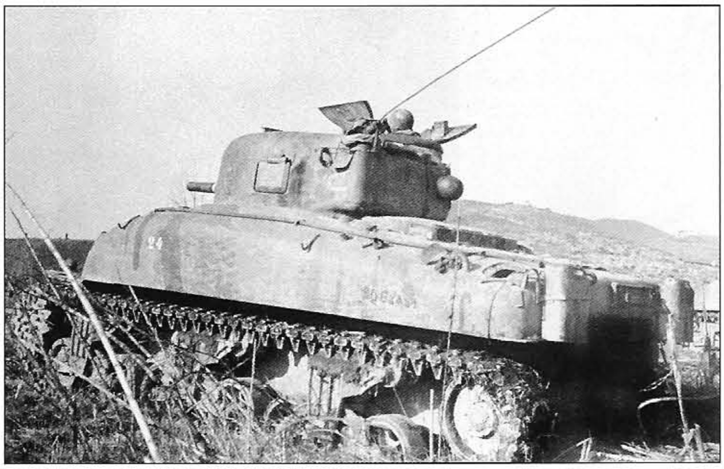
Black GIs of the 370th Infantry, 92nd Division ride on a M5 light tank of the 758th Light Tank Bn. (Colored) in Forti dei Marmi on 8 February 1945 during the attacks to capture the Cinquale canal.



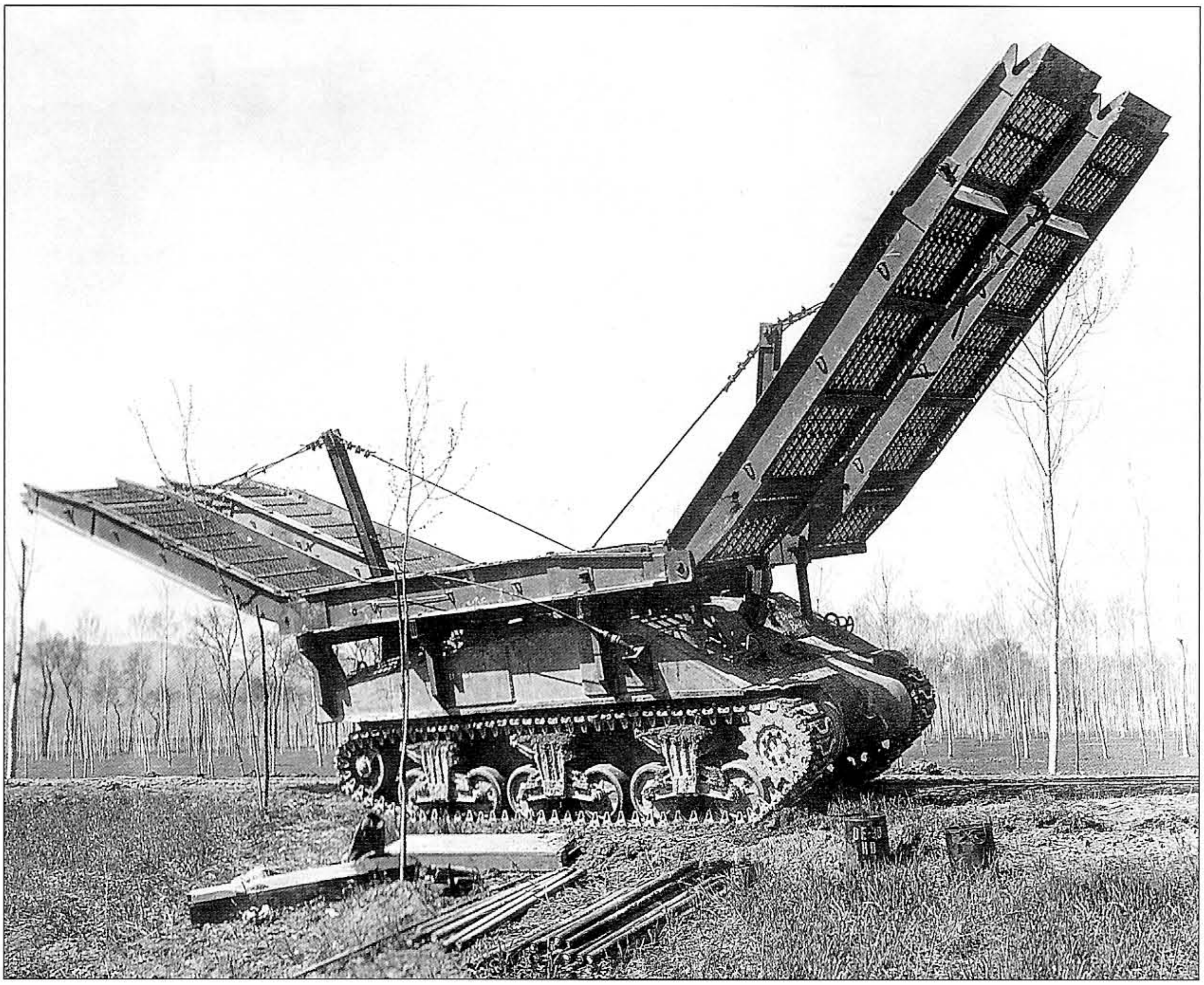
A M4 medium tank of the 751st Tank Battalion waits for orders amongst the ruins of Castel D'Aiano while supporting the 10th Mountain Division on 3 March 1945.



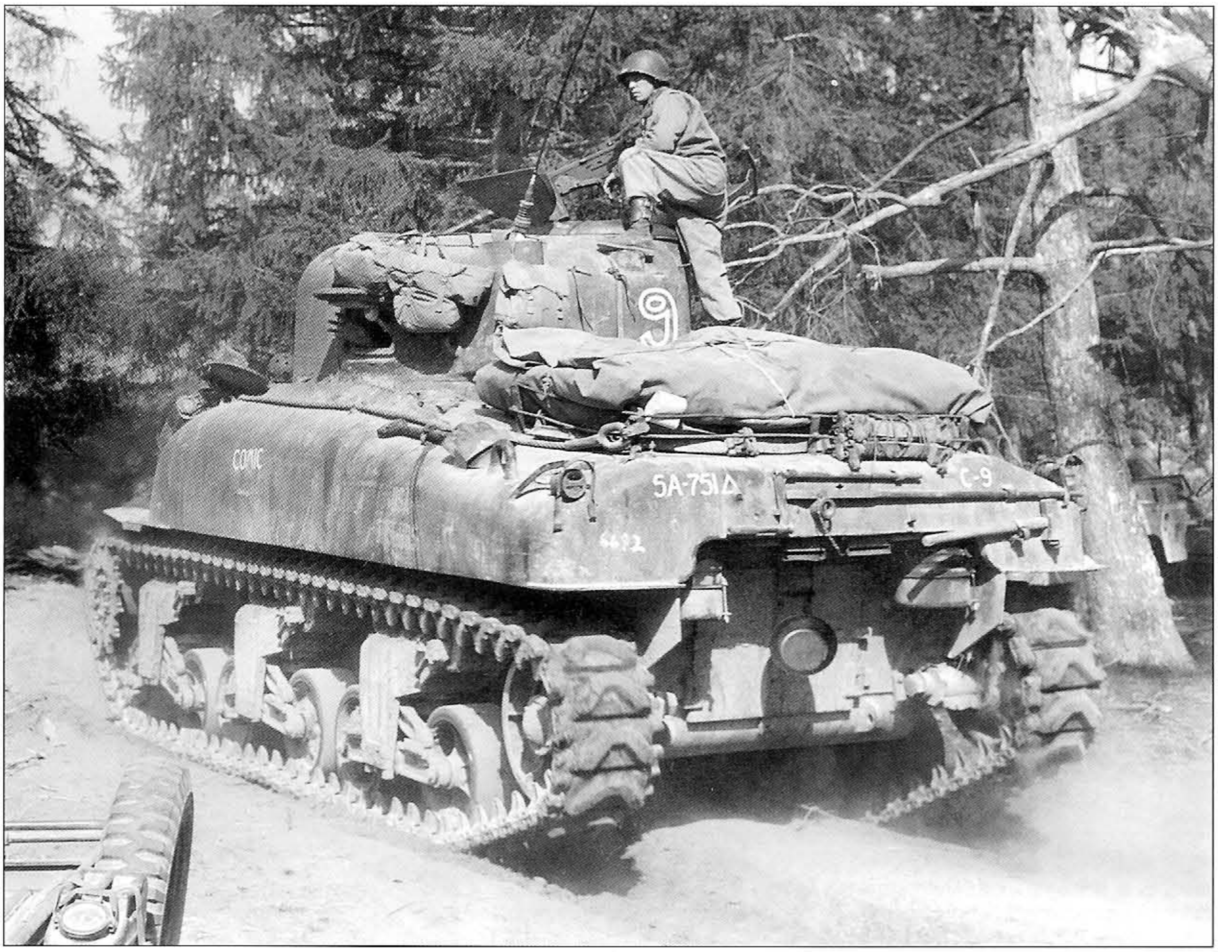
A M10 3-in. GMC provides support for the 10th Mountain Division in Sassomolare during the fighting along the Poretta-Moderna highway on 4 March 1945.



A M4A1 of the 1st Armored Division shows one of the more unusual markings applied to many of its tanks late in the Italian campaign. The tank registration numbers, instead of being painted, were added to the rear hull side as a welding bead. This particular tank has had its original tactical number on the turret, "22", replaced with a smaller number "24" on the hull side.

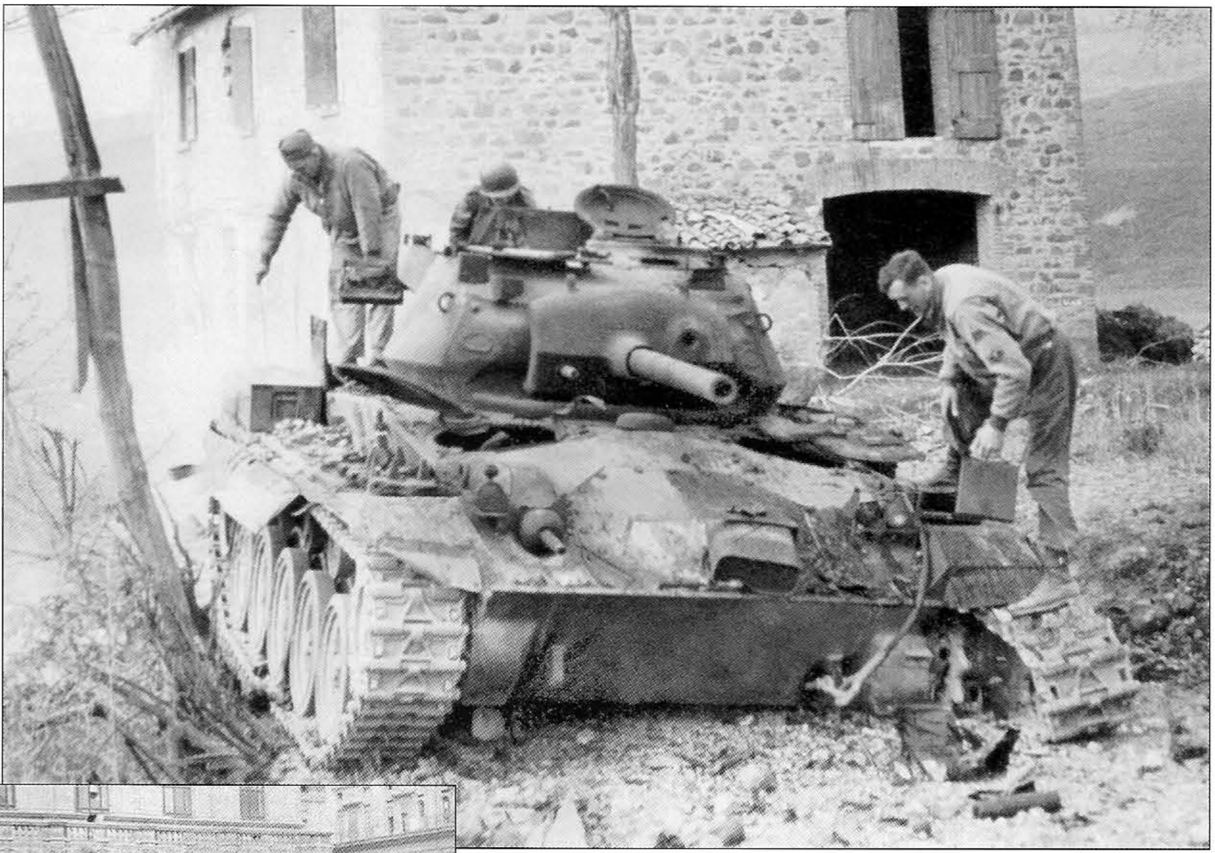


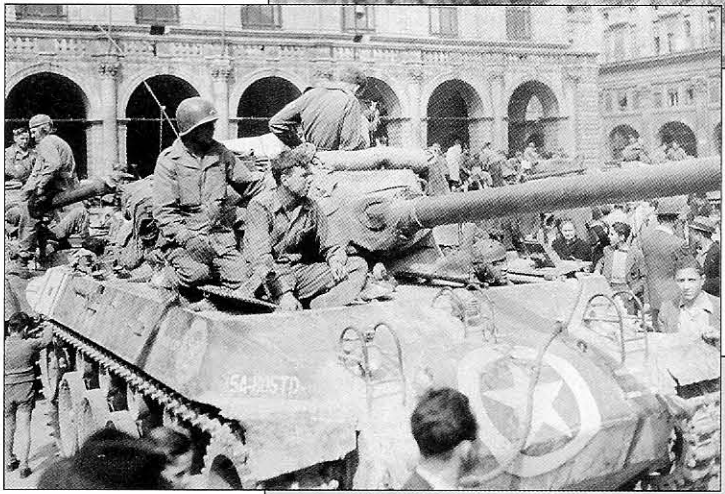
The Fifth Army ordnance battalions made numerous attempts to develop specialized assault bridging equipment to permit armored vehicles to rapidly overcome anti-tank ditches and other obstacles. This is one made from a M4 tank and sections of treadway bridge on display on 29 March 1945 during operations in northern Italy.



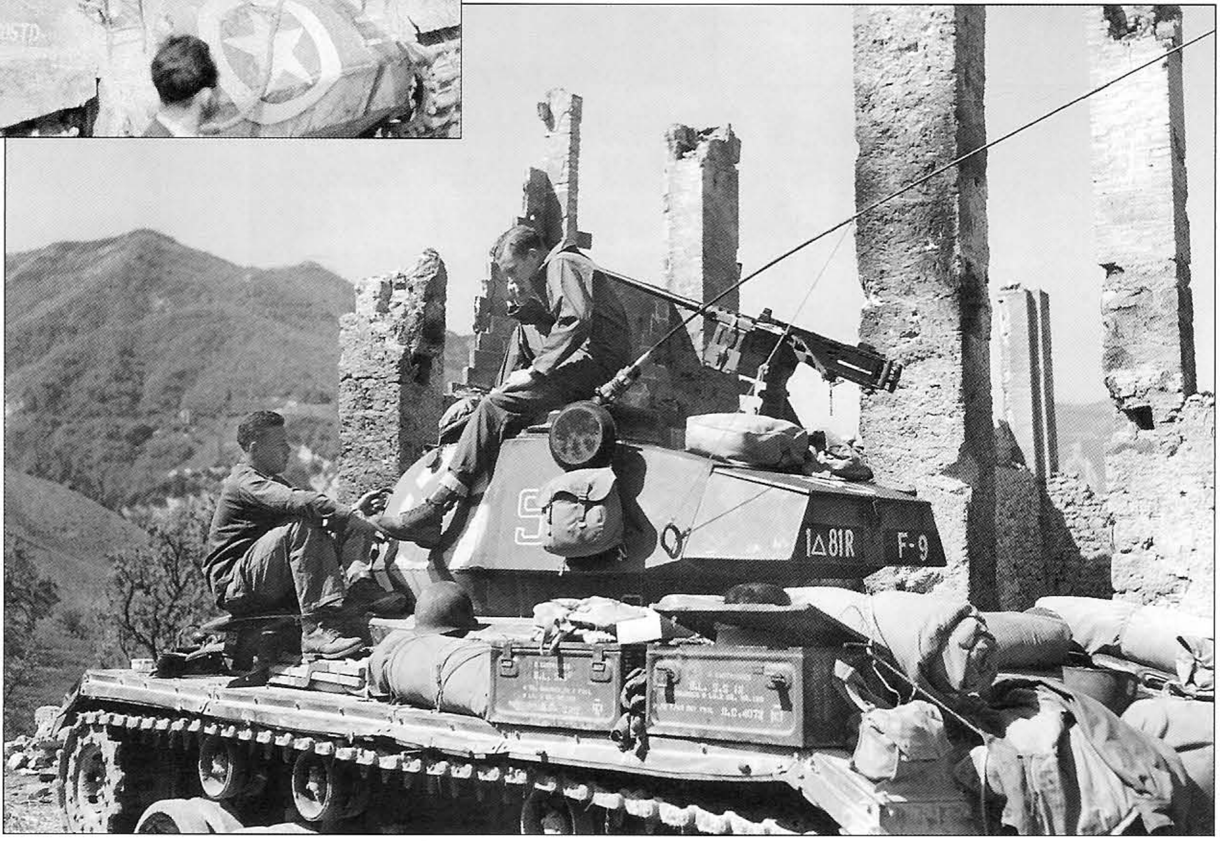
A M4A1 named "Comic" of Co. C, 751st Tank Battalion near Mt. Valbura on 14 April 1945.

The crew of a M24 light tank of the 81st Reconnaissance Squadron looks over their tank after it had been knocked out by a mine near Vergata, Italy on 16 April 1945. The M24 was a new arrival in the Italian theater, and seven were lost in combat during the final month of the war.

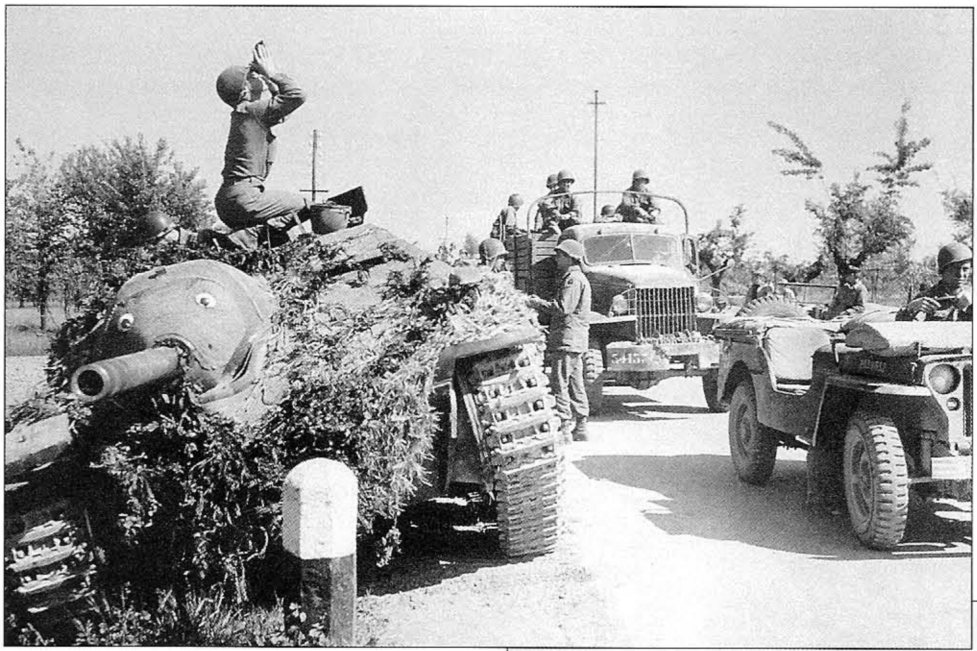




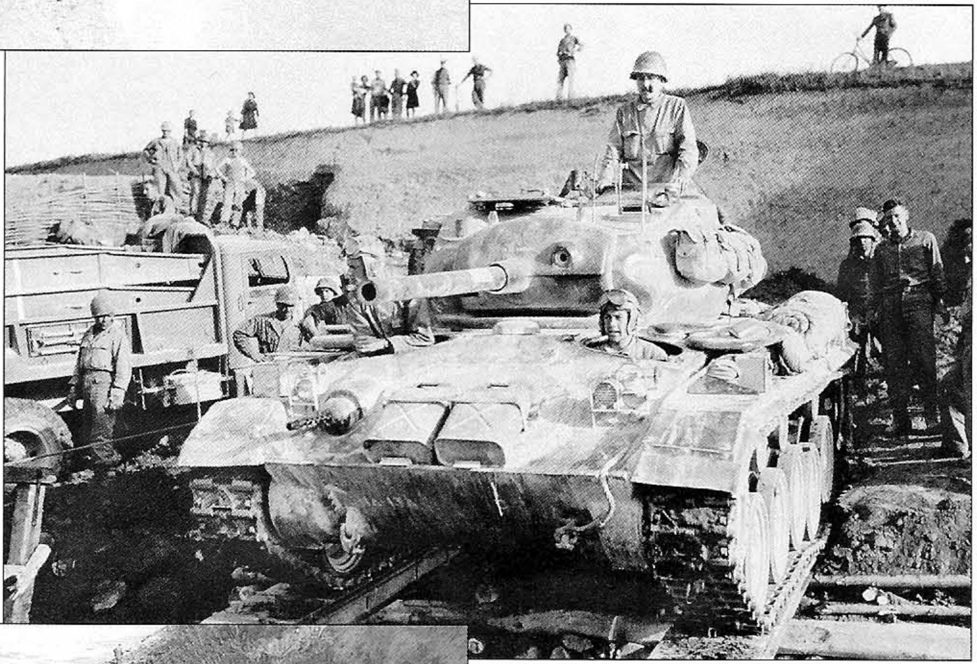
The crew of a M18 76mm GMC named "Black-Cat" of the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion takes a break in a plaza in Bologna on 21 April 1945 after the city had been captured by the 34th Division. The 805th was the only tank destroyer battalion equipped with the M18 in the Italian theater.



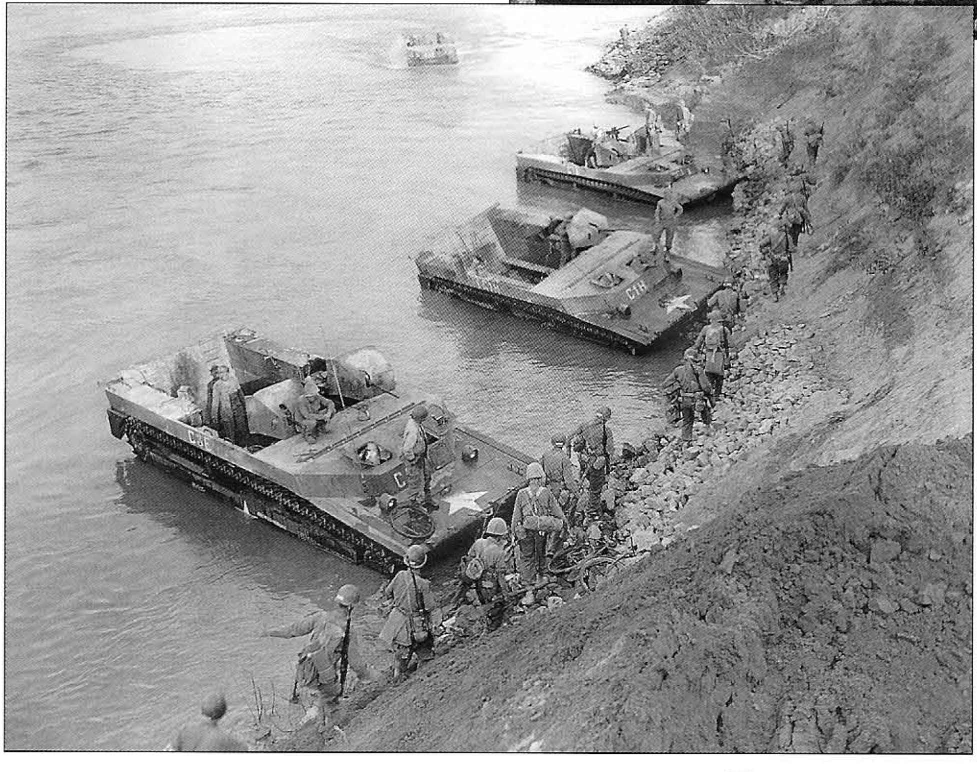
A M24 of F Troop, 81st Recon Squadron, 1st Armored Division in the Salvaro area on 17 April 1945.



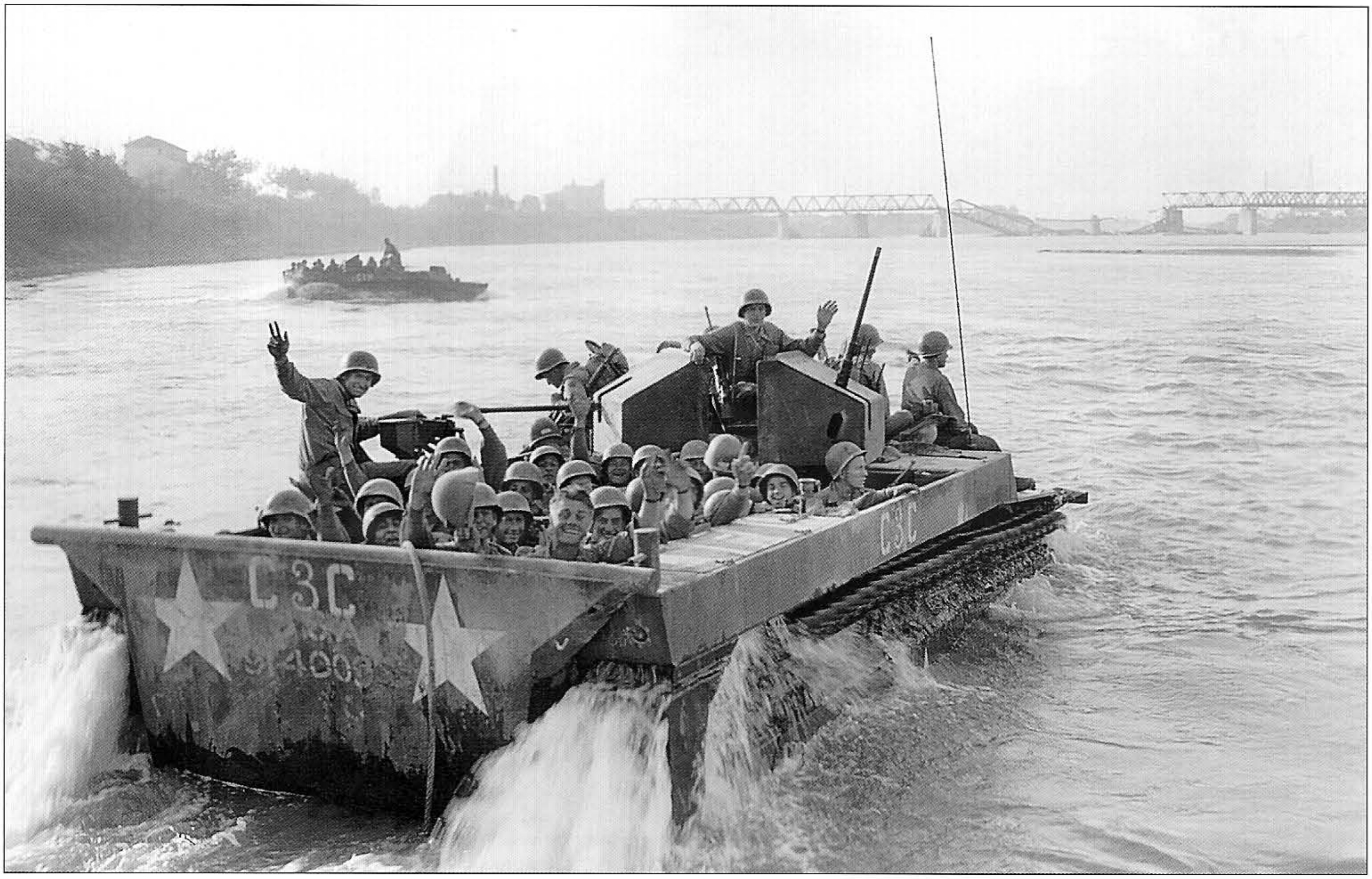
A GI uses an abandoned Hetzer of 2./Pz.Jg.Abt.305 as a perch as a column from the 134th Infantry, 34th Division passes by near Modena on 23 April 1945. The German tank destroyer has a pair of whimsical eyes painted on the gun mantlet. It was knocked out by the 760th Tank Battalion.



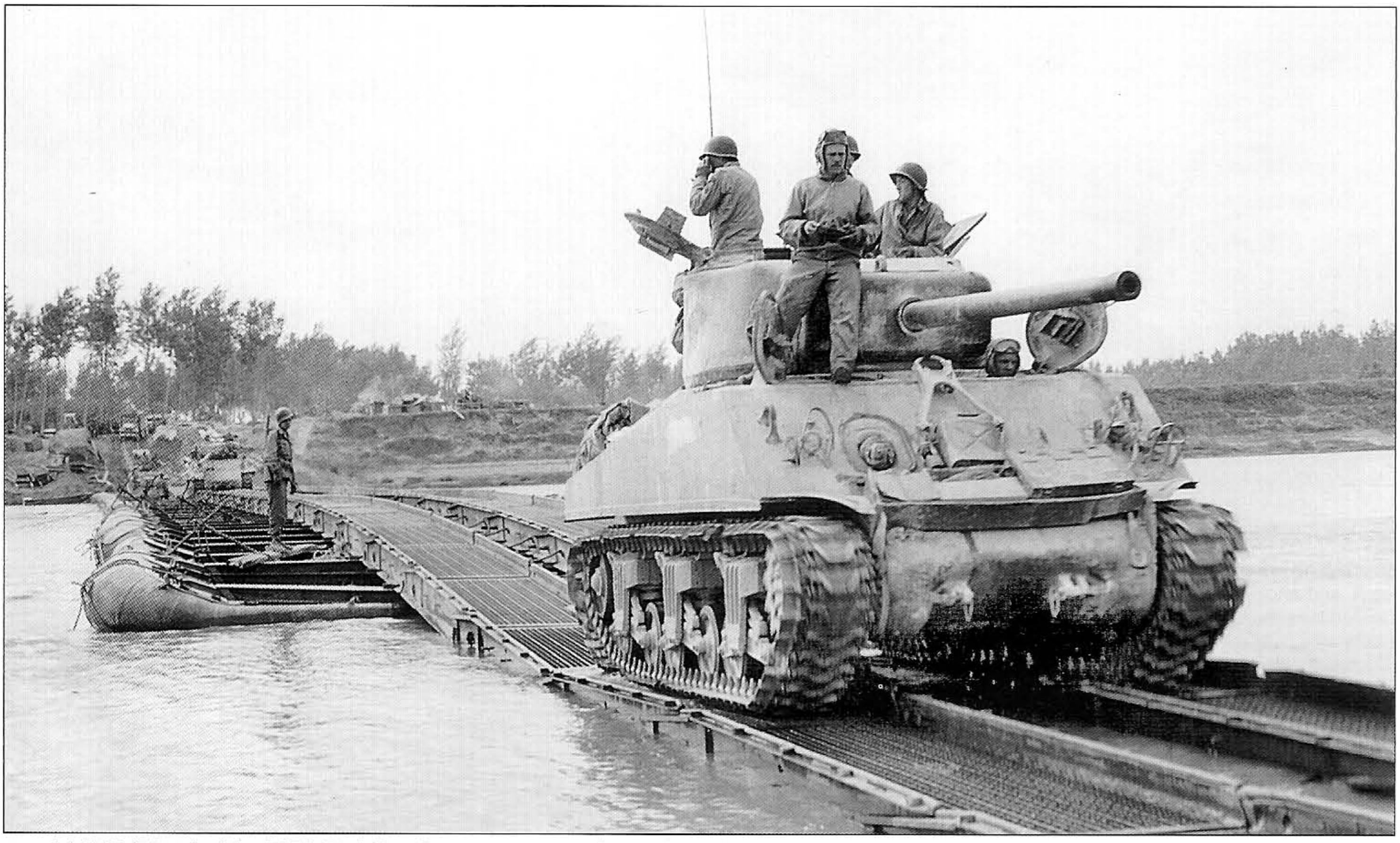
A M24 of Co. D, 13th Tank Battalion, 1st Armored Division was the first over the Po river near Brede on 24 April 1945. The hoops in front of the tank commander are a protective cover for attachment of a "donkey sight" used to fire the main gun against indirect targets.



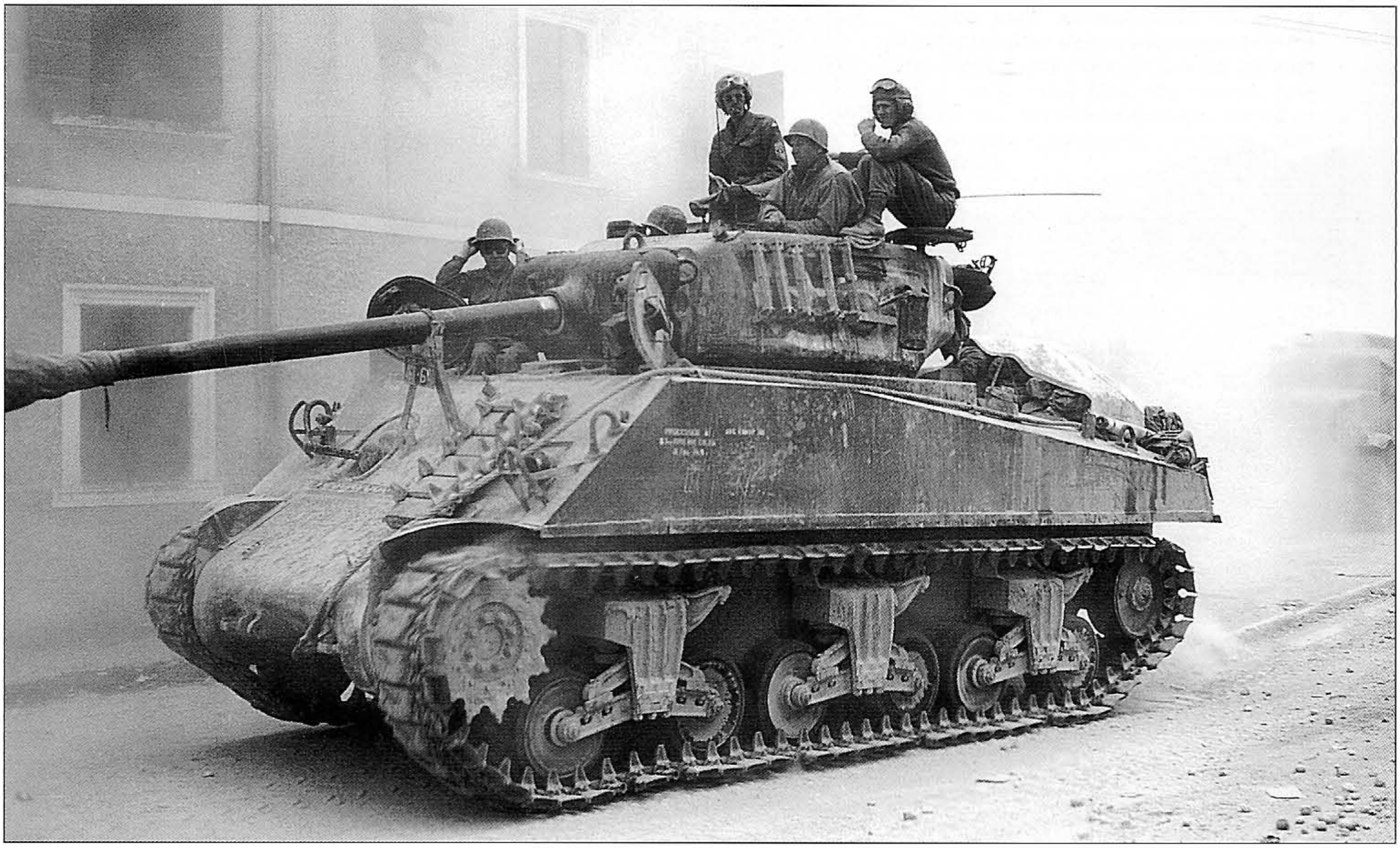
A number of LVT-4 amtracs support the 88th Division during operations along the Po river near Ostiglia on 24 April 1945.



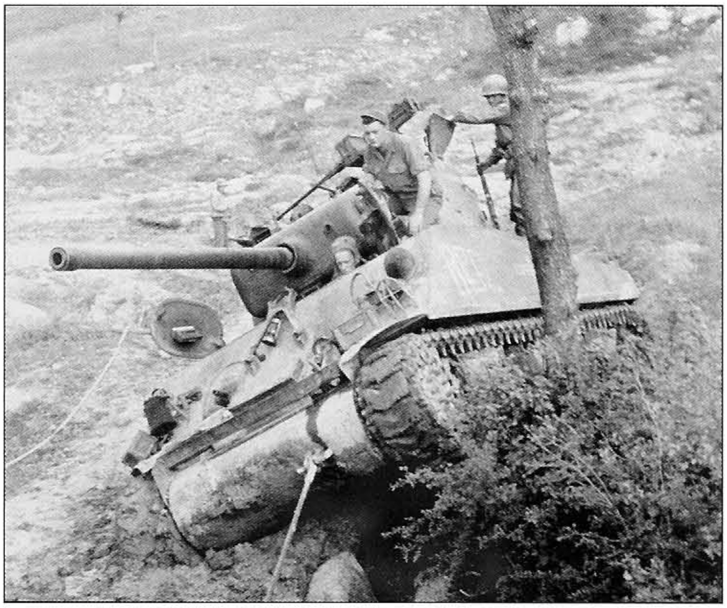
Another view of LVT-4 amtracs in operations on the Po river on 26 April 1945. This vehicle is fitted with a pair of M69E shielded bracket mounts, also known as the D7069694 mount. These were designed to give the machine-gunner some armored protection when operating the machine gun, based on lessons during the Pacific fighting.



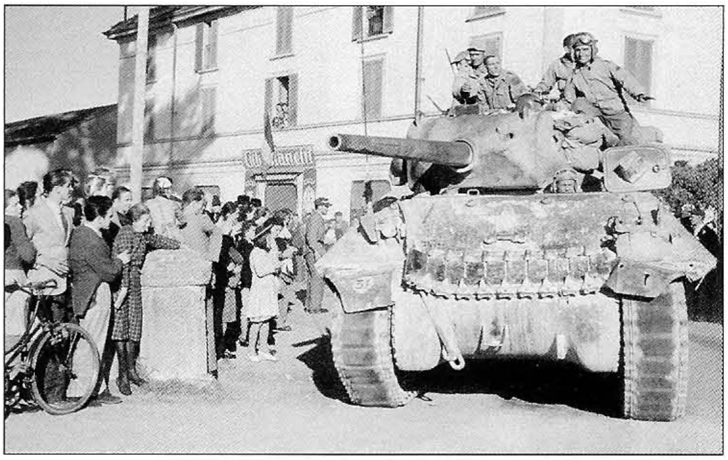
A M4A3 (76mm) of the 757th Tank Battalion crosses a treadway pontoon bridge near Revere on 26 April 1945. The tank is fitted with locally made extended end connectors, which were less commonly seen in this theater than in Germany.



Another view of a M4A3 (76mm) from the 757th Tank Battalion after crossing the Po river on 26 April 1945. This also is fitted with extended end connectors, and the tank is fitted with an improvised rack for carrying track grousers. This is a late production M4A3 (76mm), evident from the use of a muzzle brake and the later 76mm turret with the flush oval loader's hatch.



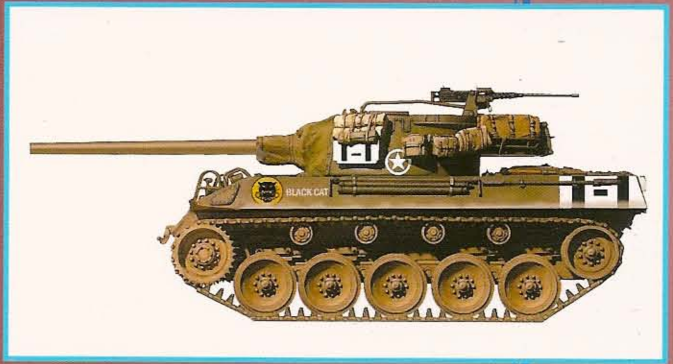
A M4A3 (76mm) from the 751st Tank Battalion is recovered near Tole after having run over a mine in April 1945. The mine has knocked off the right track, and engineering tape can be seen to the side of the tank marking a cleared lane through the minefield.

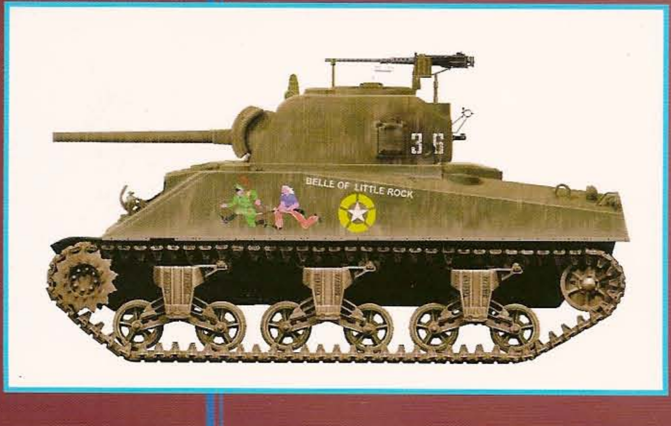


A M10 3-in. GMC drives through Arcore on 29 April 1945.

A M4 tank leads a column of vehicles from the 13th Tank Battalion, 1st Armored Division through the streets of Milan on 30 April 1945.

LIVORNO
VICARELLO
ASCIANA




BELLE OF LITTLE ROCK

ISBN 962-361-084-X
0 89195 27051 1